

*A Penguin Special*

15



GUY WINT and  
PETER CALVOCORESSI

# Middle East Crisis

*The series of events which  
preceded the recent crisis in  
the Middle East, and proposals  
for future Western policy*



40c



# YOPE DANIELS

The crisis in the Middle East which came to a head in November was the end of a tangled chain of events lasting many years. Month by month onlookers could see that an explosion was coming. This book describes the series of episodes which preceded the crisis, and assesses events and decisions which contributed to the climax. It finds the basic causes in the conflict between the Arabs and Israel and in the mistaken belief of the Western powers, especially Britain, that oil supplies could be safeguarded only if the Arab states were kept in a condition of subordinate alliance or tutelage. After recapitulating the events which followed the British ultimatum to Egypt and Israel and examining the allegations of collusion between Britain, France, and Israel, it makes proposals about future Western policy in the Middle East. The authors consider how supplies of oil can be secured in the face of the rising tide of nationalism and demands for nationalization. They suggest ways by which the Western companies can meet the changing situation. Mutual economic advantage would be the best guarantee of future agreement. They discuss the possibility of more effective action by United Nations agencies in the Middle East and examine various possibilities of keeping the peace between the Arabs and Israel. They end with an assessment of Russia's intentions in the region and proposals for Western policy the future.

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**A PENGUIN SPECIAL**  
**S167**  
**MIDDLE EAST CRISIS**  
**GUY WINT AND**  
**PETER CALVOCORESSI**





*Guy Wint and Peter Calvocoressi*

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MIDDLE EAST  
CRISIS

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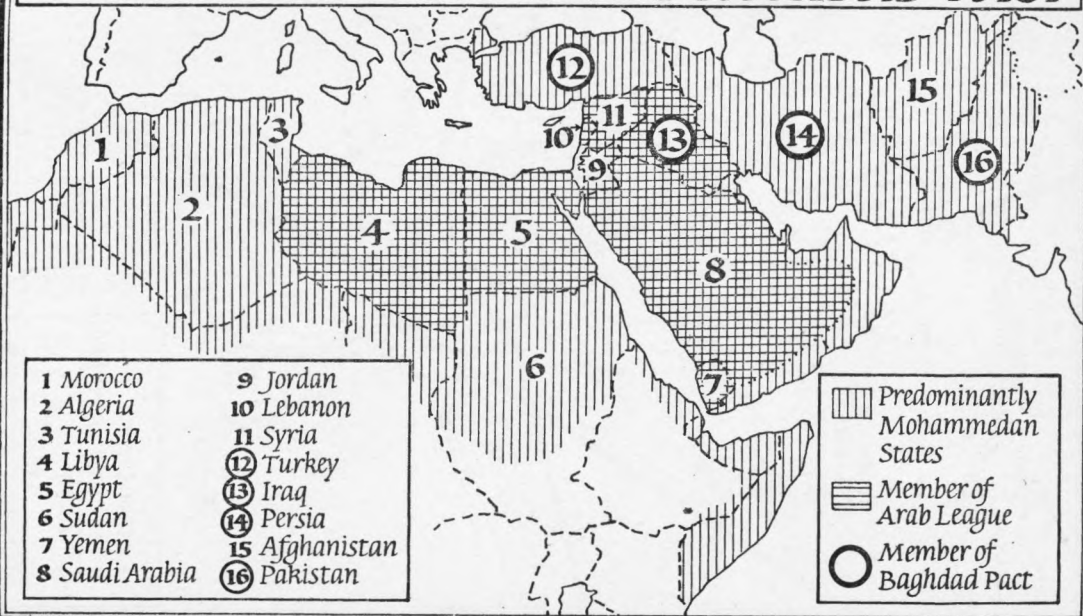


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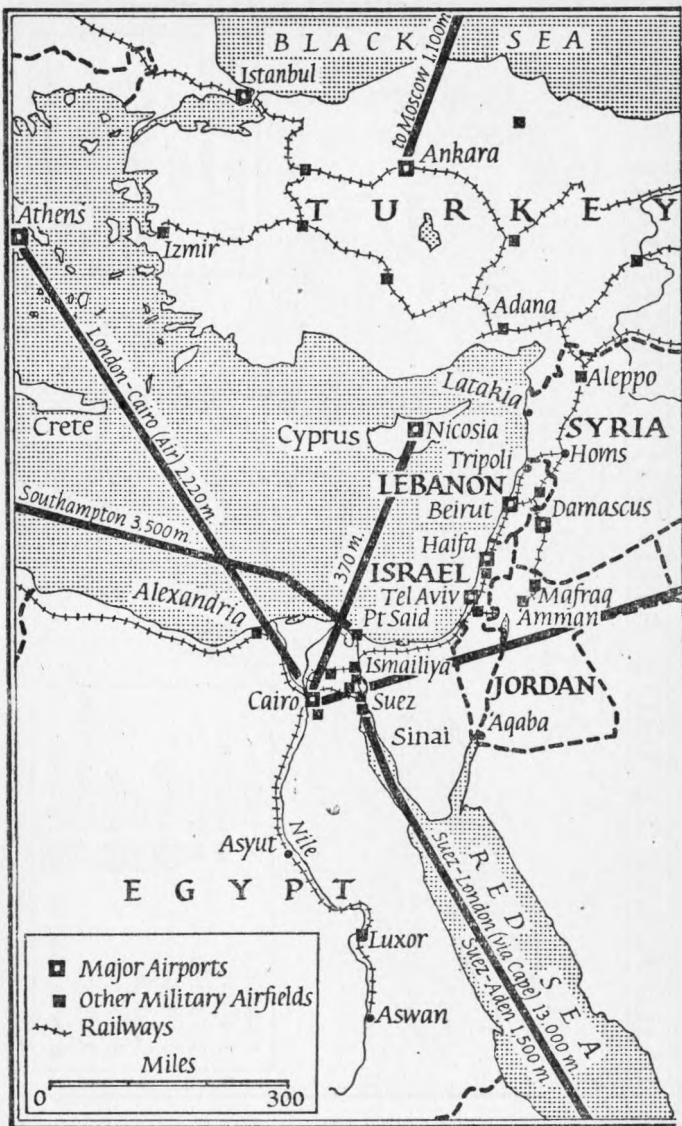
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# THE ARAB LEAGUE AND THE BAGHDAD PACT



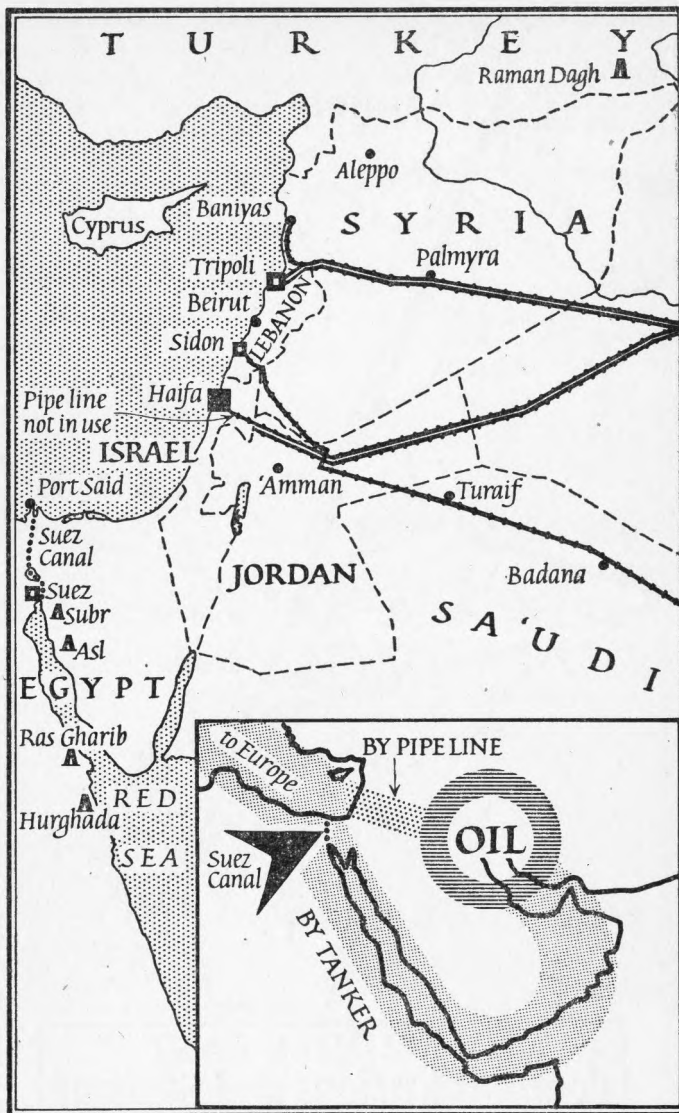














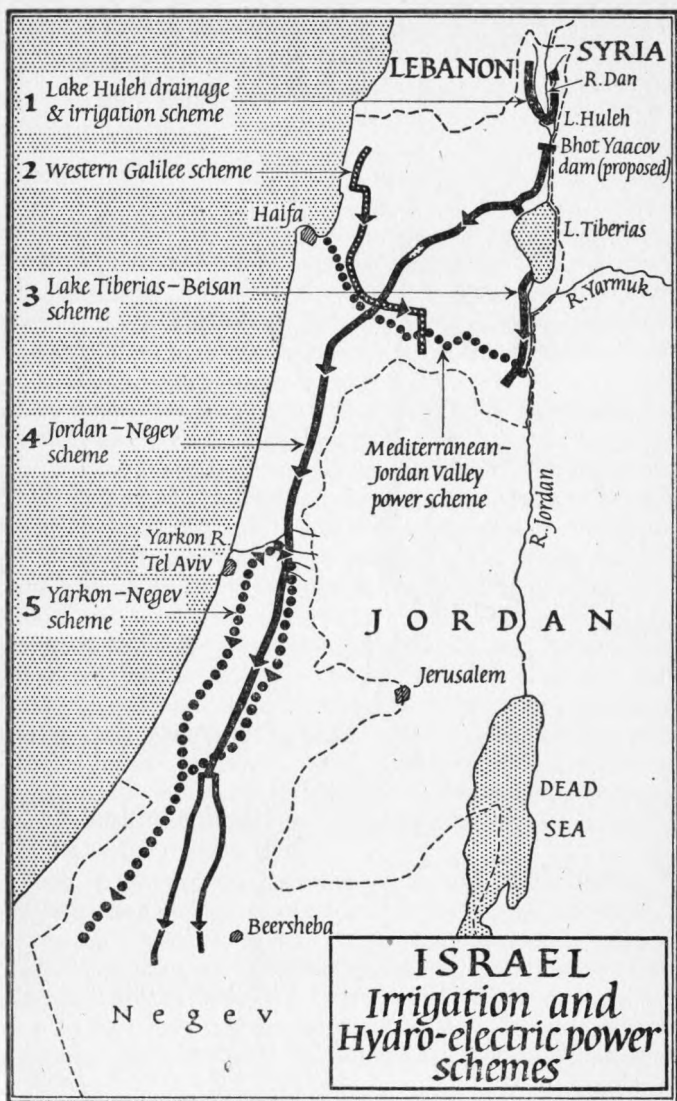
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


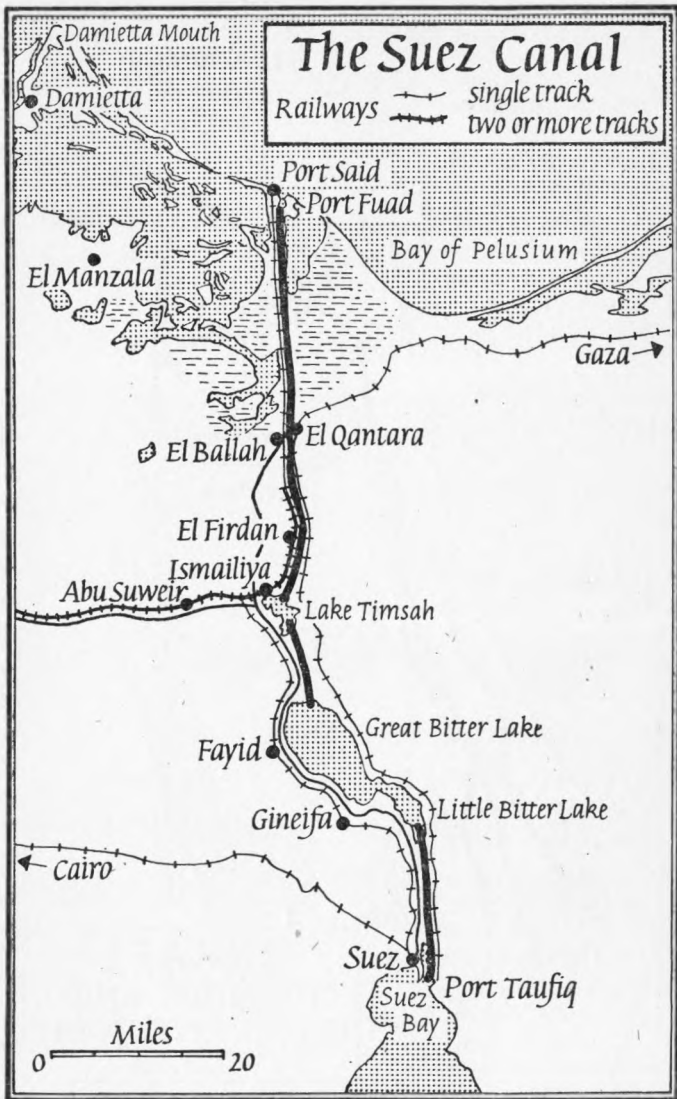






## The Suez Canal

Railways  single track  
 two or more tracks





*Part One*  
**BACKGROUND**

THE British and French invasion of Egypt in November 1956 was the end of a tangled chain of events lasting many years. Blunders by individuals – worse than blunders – may have caused this calamity; but the invasion was the nemesis of a Middle East policy by Britain which has not for a long while been based on sound principles, and which has seldom been in keeping with the realities of the time. The only good thing which may come out of the disaster is an opportunity for a new start.

The consequences of the armed action against Egypt were so alarming and so world-wide that those who made the decisions were obviously surprised, even though they claim that they were taking risks which they had calculated. Public opinion in Britain became more excited and divided than at any time since the controversy over appeasing Hitler. The action of the British government, even if charitably interpreted, raised questions of morals, politics, and judgement which will continue to be debated for a very long time. The Commonwealth was divided; Britain was repudiated by the American President; Asia's suspicion that Europe still had colonial ambitions was revived; the prestige of Britain was reduced in Africa as well as in Asia, and changes which might have taken place there in a controlled and temperate way have probably been speeded up. In British domestic politics, many events of the future may have to be traced to their origin in the upheaval of the Suez crisis.

Perhaps the recovery by Britain of its international prestige will be quicker than now looks probable, for the passage between success and disaster has been accelerated in contemporary politics. Other crises, changing Britain's position, may dwarf the Suez one. But, unless this happens, the Suez episode may be remembered as a sinister date in both international and domestic affairs. After the crisis very little in the Middle East can be quite the same as before.

Of course the crisis was not caused by Britain alone. The region erupted and Britain chose to become involved. The outbreak was



the result of having left the grave conflicts in the Middle East unremedied for too many years; and for this all the Great Powers divide responsibility. The actions of the United Nations Assembly, a reversal of judgement by some British ministers, and American intervention, checked, or postponed, the movement towards more general catastrophe. But until the basic conflicts in the Middle East are reduced, there can be no confidence that another crisis will not next time pass beyond control.

What are these conflicts? What policies, of what countries, led us to the ruin of war? What better policies can the British government adopt in future? These questions are the theme of this book.

The story of the crisis has no very clearly marked beginning in time. Few great convulsions in history can ever be traced back to causes beyond which there are not very relevant prior causes. But the start of the present circumstances can be seen pretty clearly in the break up of the Ottoman Empire as the result of the first world war.

The Ottoman Empire had straddled the Middle East. The Middle East is not a precise geographical expression; at different times it has signified now a very large area, now a more confined one. Who first used the term is not certain; at one stage it was more fashionable to call the region the Near East, and today Mr Nehru is setting the fashion of calling it West Asia. In its most restricted sense it includes the Arab lands of Asia together with Egypt. Usually it means Persia and Turkey also, and sometimes it includes the westward extension of the Arab lands which, flanking the Mediterranean, leads through Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco to the Atlantic Ocean.

The greater part of the peoples of this very large region are Moslems. Islam is a unifying force; rather like Confucianism it is a religion which prescribes uniformity of conduct. It emphasizes that men, merely by being men, are brothers, are equal in the sight of God, and have dignity even in poverty. In the eyes of the rest of the world, Islam has given the region a certain romance; it evokes memories of the Crusades. The mixture of monotheism, picturesque nomad life, deserts and Bedouin and camels and caravans, fanaticism, and a tradition of male gregariousness have fascinated three or four generations of Westerners, especially the British. They have often failed to recognize, or been unwilling to



recognize, that the old order is changing.<sup>1</sup> It is not easy to determine the part which Islam has played in the present crisis. The tendency to-day is often to undervalue the power of religion, even in decadence. Islam has given to the peoples of the Middle East a passion in resisting the pressure of non-Islamic governments; it may also have given these peoples a greater unwillingness than elsewhere to accept Western civilization. True, many of the leaders in the Islamic countries are secular and reformist in their outlook, but they are under mass pressure from the people. Islam has provided much of the setting and scenery of the crisis. But, to understand the crisis, a deep understanding of the Islamic religion is not very necessary. Nationalism, economics, military strategy are the terms in which the crisis has to be grasped, and religion and culture enter only secondarily. If a terror organization like the Moslem Brotherhood is linked with ideas of a revived and purified Islam, terror organizations themselves are nothing new, and operate in the Middle East very much as in the West.

The fall of a great empire, however fervently desired at the time, is often the start of troubles. It causes a vacuum. It causes new conflicts. It stirs restless ambitions. When the Ottoman Empire fell, it was replaced neither by a single dominant imperial power able to maintain imperial order, nor by independent sovereign successor states, as the Habsburg Empire had been in Europe. The Middle East region, since the end of the Ottoman Empire, has been one in which the external powers compete, but in which none is dominant; and it has been one in which the Arab countries struggle against these intruding great powers for their freedom. These circumstances are the clue to much of the region's history. They resemble closely the circumstances in the Balkans in the first years of the century.

1. Sir Robert Boothby made some true observations on this recently in the House of Commons. 'I have listened to Englishmen expatiating on the nights which they have spent under the wide and starry sky, talking about the camel rides which they took in the desert long before the war. But the Bedouin are no longer thinking of camels. They are thinking of Cadillacs. This is a different world. And perhaps it is no bad thing that the tremendous romantic illusion which the English have had about the Arabs should come down to hard reality. It has been a romantic, but for a long time a very one-sided, love affair.'



The fall of the Ottoman Empire had been hastened by a revolt of its subject people, the Arabs. This was assisted, as part of the operations of the first world war, by Britain and France. At the end of the war, when the Empire had disintegrated, these countries took it for granted that the Arab lands which were only at the beginning of modernization and which were popularly thought of as so much desert roamed over by Bedouin, could not stand on their own feet. They needed a guiding hand. No proposal was made to turn them openly into Western colonies. But they were entrusted by the League of Nations as mandated territories to the care and supervision of Britain and France. In effect they became puppet states, or client states, or, to use a term borrowed from the British political system in India, states which were in a relation of subordinate alliance.

This was not Britain's first acquisition of authority in the Middle East. Since 1881 it had controlled Egypt. Intent on guarding its communications with India it had imposed on it a virtual protectorate, though in theory it continued to respect the Turkish suzerainty over the country. The system in Egypt was the shadow of what was to become general after 1919. The British mandates were Iraq – the ancient land of Mesopotamia – , Transjordan, the great desert region behind the River Jordan, and Palestine; Syria and the partly Christian Lebanon were the mandates of the French.<sup>1</sup> Of the Arab lands, only Saudi Arabia and the Yemen, vast tracts of empty desert with the most backward social organization in Arabia, were left free. This was before the day when the oil riches of Saudi Arabia were suspected.

When they arranged this settlement, the British thought of themselves as the liberators of the Arabs from the Turks – but the Arabs thought of them as the new Turks. From then on, the nationalism of the Arabs was directed against Britain and France, whom the Arabs thought of as having cheated them of the independence which they were supposed to have promised. Its object

1. France had established its interest in this area in the last century when it made itself the patron of the Christian Arabs. It intervened with the Turkish government in 1860 after the Druzes had massacred 20,000 Christians, and as a result secured a special status for the Lebanon, which was given autonomy under a Christian governor appointed by Turkey.



was to complete the liberation of the Arab peoples, to establish their equality with the West, and to secure the sovereign independence of the Arab countries. True, the Arabs did not pursue this object with a single heart because some parts of the governing groups in some of the Arab lands saw advantages in temporary accommodation with the West. But the underlying pressure was continuous.<sup>1</sup>

The Arab struggle against the West expressed itself during the twenties and thirties in periodical collisions in Egypt and in growing restiveness in all the other countries except Jordan, whose political life was slow to develop. Though Britain was on the whole a benevolent overlord – more benevolent than France – it was an overlord none the less, and was thus the adversary of nationalism. The Arabs felt the foreign hand distorting the course of their political life. They blamed the West for keeping alive out-of-date monarchies and feudal classes. The Arabs resented that economic power was combined with political power in British hands.

The Arab intelligentsia was even more hostile to the West than was, say, the Indian intelligentsia, and this was paradoxical, because the Arab countries were never more than half subject to the West, and India had been totally so. The explanation was that the Arab countries, just because the West controlled their governments and not their peoples, never experienced the Western influence in its constructive, cultural, liberating aspect – less even than did the Chinese in rather similar circumstances, because the Chinese accepted missionary influence and the Arabs on the whole did not. The relations of the Arabs with the West were diplomatic, commercial, and military; the West never had the power to transform Arab society, to offer a new civilization, or to reorganize the educational and legal systems, as Britain did in India. The nationalists who opposed the British in India were themselves the creation of the British Raj and recognized themselves as its children; with much restraint they continued to cultivate the good things in British civilization while fighting for freedom. The

1. A visitor in Iraq wrote recently: 'In talk with many Iraqi students, one senses their impression that a British Foreign Secretary gets up at dawn and studies till midnight one theme – how to dupe the Arabs.'



Arabs – except for a short time the Egyptians – had less chance of seeing these good things.

Nor was that all. The countries which had formed part of the British Empire nearly all underwent a discipline which enabled them to develop rapidly and successfully their own systems of self-government. That happened in India and Ceylon, and soon it may be proved to have happened in Nigeria and Ghana. Thus in these countries the propulsive nationalist movements have resulted in the setting up of very satisfactory modern states. In the Arab countries it was quite different. Their systems of government were ramshackle. They were either mock parliamentary systems operated by corrupt cliques, or military dictatorships. The countries had not undergone a revivifying experience culturally or socially, and this was shown in the lack of intellectual creativeness. In consequence, nationalism was barren. Even if it succeeded in breaking the system imposed by the foreigner it could not replace him by a stable system of its own devising, capable of making much-needed social and economic reforms.

The Western system of client states was shaken during the second world war. Because France and Britain were divided, Britain backed Arab nationalism in Syria, and France forfeited its hold there. France dropped out of the picture, though it still played a part in Arab politics because of its hold upon the Arab lands of North Africa. In the Middle East proper, Britain alone remained to carry on the client system. In course of time, and with the general collapse of imperial power, Britain might have been inclined to wind up the peculiar structure. But this was prevented by one special circumstance. It was the circumstance which has given the Middle East in recent years its special place in the world. It was oil.

Oil had been extracted in Persia from early in the century. But not until the latter part of the thirties was there any grasp of the tremendous resources of oil in the Arab countries. By the end of the second world war it was fully understood. A few figures are instructive. In 1938 the oil traffic carried through the Suez Canal was just over five million tons; by 1955 it was sixty-eight million. It was discovered that a very high proportion of the oil reserves of the world was in the Middle East; eventually the figure was to be put at two-thirds; the minute state of Kuwait, with a



population of 200,000, is said to contain one-fifth of the world's reserves, as these are at present known.<sup>1</sup> After these changes and discoveries, the Arab countries were seen in a new light. Britain felt that its own prosperity depended so much upon safeguarding the oil supplies that it dared not relinquish political ascendancy over the countries where it had acquired it. It became a fixed idea of British policy that the defence of oil required the maintenance of British political influence or even authority, both in individual countries and as a stabilizing force for the Middle East as a whole. The hope was that this influence could be perpetuated with Arab consent. From time to time Britain was ready to revise its treaties with its client states to make the relationship more equal, at least in appearance. But its hope of Arab consent was bound to be disappointed because nationalism would not be satisfied with anything less than genuine independence, and nationalism spread inevitably.

The perennial mistake in British policy in the Middle East was to underrate the force of Arab nationalism, and to fail to grasp its main sentiment, which is a passionate longing for the assertion of full sovereignty and equality. Britain protests constantly that it has learned the lessons about nationalism, and realizes that there is no safety except in coming to terms with it; but its record in the Middle East belies the claim. The stationing of foreign troops in a country, even if it is alleged to be for the country's own protection, is a red rag to nationalism. The Arabs wanted to get the whole Western military machine off their backs, whatever the cost. One of the paradoxes of post-war history is that Britain understood very well the sensibilities, even the neuroses, of nationalism in India and Burma and Ceylon, but showed far less comprehension of them in the Middle East. In India, Britain made the surrender of its privileged position which enabled it to gain a new, profitable, and respected position. But in the Middle East it failed to do so. Yet the same kind of people who dealt with British relations in South Asia were dealing also with the Middle East.

Nationalism, oil – these were two factors which even by themselves might have made the Middle East dangerously stormy.

1. The total production of crude oil in the Middle East in 1938 was 6 million tons. In 1955 it was 163 million. (See Appendix A).



There was another factor, the most dangerous of all, and that was Israel.

A very great deal has been written about the foundation of the state of Israel. In retrospect it appears one of the strangest operations of history. The foundation would have been impossible and inconceivable except during the short space of years at the end of the first world war when it was carried out. The Ottoman authority had collapsed, and the Arab countries were not sufficiently developed to be able to oppose and block the original project as they would have been a few years later. The settlement of the Jews in Palestine began as a simple immigration of Jewish farmers at the beginning of the century, many of them from Russia. During the first world war the British government backed the idea that Palestine should be constituted as a National Home for the Jews. But there was still no plan that it should be a Jewish state; Palestine was to remain the home of Arabs also; its government was placed by the League of Nations under a British mandate. What was to be its ultimate status politically was not made clear.

The concept of the National Home was really impracticable from the start. Resident Arabs resented intruding Jews, even though they might bring prosperity. Tension grew. For the outside world there might seem romance, poetry, or justice in the return of the ancient Jewish people to their ancestral home, prophecy thus being fulfilled. The Jews who for nearly two thousand years had been saying at each Passover that next year they would celebrate it in Jerusalem found that they could at last really do so. But in Arab eyes the Jews were an alien people, formerly despised, who were being settled upon Arab lands through the patronage of the Western countries. Under the mandate Palestine had become another client state of Britain, and was all the more obnoxious because Jews, not Arabs, were the British clients.

Hitler's persecution of the Jews in Germany and their flight to Palestine created a much larger Jewish population there than had been foreseen. This increased the Arab bitterness and increased also the determination of the Jews to convert their national home into an independent state. Arabs and Jews organized themselves militarily, or semi-militarily, and began a more or less covert civil war. Britain, the mandatory power, dis-



covered what it might have foreseen in advance – the impossibility of reconciling the aim of winning the friendship or confidence of the Arab peoples, and similarly of retaining the strategically important territory in Palestine by being the protector of the Jews. The shifts and evasions of British policy were sad to watch, but were the consequence of pursuing opposed objectives. Final decisions were delayed by the second world war, but soon after its end Britain, harried beyond endurance by Jewish terror organizations and subjected to Jewish pressure at home, abandoned the mandate. Ninety thousand troops had not availed to put down terrorism. The United Nations accepted a plan for partitioning the country, and created a Jewish state, Israel, which was to be confederated with an Arab one.

If the Arabs had reconciled themselves to the United Nations plan, they would at least have confined the Jews within narrow borders. The Jewish state was to be a small one. But a sovereign alien state in the heart of the Arab lands was intolerable to Arab nationalism. It does not take much imagination to understand why.

The various Arab states, feeling that a gross wrong had been done them by the United Nations, and that the United Nations had no particular sanctity and could properly be challenged, decided to prevent by force the carrying out of the United Nations resolutions. On the day when the British mandate ended, in May 1948, the armies of five Arab states began to invade Israel. Unhappily for the Arabs, even though they might feel their cause was just, their armies were for the most part excessively incompetent; and their different governments could not co-operate. As a result, they suffered defeat. Israel, with a population of less than a million, a state only a few weeks old, and with no foreign aid except in arms and money, threw back the Arab invasion by countries whose total population numbered forty million and whose regular armies had been trained for years.

This brief campaign is the turning point in the modern history of the Far East. Before the campaign, one set of circumstances and problems had continued unchanged for years. The second world war, with all its tumult, had changed little in the area. It was not a watershed in time. But after the war between Jews and Arabs,



there were new factors. The old mould was broken and could not be re-shaped. Israel had arrived and was formidable. The Arabs had been humiliated.

While the war had continued, the propaganda of the Arab governments to their own people had disguised the defeats. The Arab radio still speaks in the idiom of the Arabian Nights: it is a pleasure to listen to. But the facts became known. A lost war and a national humiliation nearly always produce domestic upheaval. That is what has been happening ever since in the Arab countries, except in Saudi Arabia. Revolution in Egypt and Lebanon, assassination in Jordan and Syria, riots in Baghdad – these had their cause in the disastrous war. Arab public opinion wanted governments which would eliminate Israel.

The Arabs accepted an armistice with Israel; they would not convert it into a peace. The war of revenge, the next round, hung before their eyes. That has become one of the fixed topics of Middle East politics.

To complete thereafter the explosiveness of the Middle East, only one thing was wanting. That was that it should become a principal theatre of the feud between the Great Powers. Rather strangely, it was not such until quite recently. Why Russia showed little interest in the Middle East in the post-war years will probably remain a mystery. It is not that it was traditionally a region in which Russia had no concern. The Tsars were keenly interested. In Molotov's negotiations with Hitler in the months before Germany attacked Russia, Molotov revealed the Russian ambition to inherit at least a part of the British ascendancy. During the war, Russia, as a precautionary military measure, occupied Persia in co-operation with Britain. For a few months at the end of the war it seemed likely that Russia would continue the occupation, and it created in part of North Persia a puppet Communist government. But when Britain and America protested vigorously it withdrew, and afterwards its interest both in Persia and also in the Arab countries was for some years conspicuously absent. The West was relieved and puzzled.

It has been suggested that one reason why Stalin did not carry on an aggressive policy in the Middle East was that he was afraid that if he did so he would attract American intervention. He preferred that America should be kept away, even if at the cost of



tolerating the British presence. The half-commitment of America to an interest in the Middle East was one of the main factors in the post-war years. America was concerned, especially after the development of American oil interests in Saudi Arabia and the acquisition there of the important air base at Dhahran; but it was less ready to take responsibility than Britain. It had taken the leading role in the establishment of Israel; but it excused itself as much as possible from playing a part in preventing an Arab war against Israel. It feared the extension of Russian power; but it saw sympathetically that the Arab hostility to Britain was no other than the hostility of all subject peoples against imperialism. It wanted the benefits of being present in the Middle East, but put off as long as possible the making of any too positive commitments.

Russia's aloofness ended in the summer of 1955. It could not last. Britain was too evidently vulnerable in the Middle East. In all previous times of war or tension, other countries had understood that, and sooner or later Russia was bound to act upon it. Moreover, the revelation in the post-war years of the colossal size of the oil reserves in the Middle East has increased year by year the importance of the region in world politics, until Russia could stand aloof no more. If it could ever be in a position to deny the oil to Western Europe, it would have an invaluable instrument of blackmail; and with the possibility of Russia needing in future larger supplies of oil than it can itself produce, it must regard the Middle East as an attractive source. Saudi Arabia seems to have attracted it the most, as immensely rich in resources and as probably the easiest to penetrate. Its aim must be to gain control of the oil without war, for in a war the oilfields would be devastated.

Even with all these causes inclining Russia towards a forward policy in the Middle East, it might still have held back if the West had not shown an obstinate intention to extend to the Middle East the same kind of strategy for containing Russia which it had adopted elsewhere. It wanted to ring Russia with Western bases. For this purpose it tried first to persuade the Arab countries to accept a Middle East Defence Organization, a counterpart of Nato, which would be under Western control. When most of these countries declined, it promoted a military



alliance, the Baghdad Pact, which was formed out of the countries immediately adjacent to Russia. This was made in the spring of 1955. Russia evidently regarded it as a threat to its security, and its Middle Eastern policy was thereafter directed to one prime aim – the removal of the Western bases from its borders. To bring this about it was willing to intervene at all points in the domestic affairs of the Middle East. This coincided with the competition between the West and Russia, which developed after the Geneva Conference, for the allegiance of the uncommitted countries; and the Arab countries were among the chief of these. Thus from 1955 onwards the Middle East became a third main centre of Cold War, additional to Western Europe and the Far East.

The manner of Russia's intervention, when it came, was an intrusion into the quarrel between Israel and the Arabs. Russia had recognized Israel immediately after its foundation; its aim in backing the Zionists had probably been to drive out Britain from one of its bases, Palestine. But until 1955 it took little further part in the quarrel between Israel and the Arabs. Then it began to turn the quarrel to its advantage. It attracted the Arabs by offering them abundant arms for carrying on their quarrel. By this, at one bound it gained great advantages, and caused resentment by the Western countries; after that, it was unlikely again to withdraw. Russia has been able, with little risk and little cost, to discomfort the West. At the same time it increases the disorder.

Such, in the very broadest outline, was the background to the crisis which we have now been enduring, and which may set off worse crises by chain reaction. Its elements were assembled stage by stage. At any time during the last five years any intelligent on-looker could have predicted ultimate disaster. Yet at no stage was any minister or government found with the power or skill to change the situation, or to do more than gain a few months' respite by helping to reduce the immediate pressures. If no fundamental changes can be made, the crisis will certainly recur. Not even the universal fear of hydrogen bombs can safely keep the peace if the Middle East erupts.

One factor is still absent, fortunately, though it may not continue to be so. That is the blind pressure towards revolution from hungry or desperate people. Not that there is not much



hunger and misery among the Arab countries. Egypt, with a population of twenty-two million, increasing rapidly and penned into the narrow valley of the Nile, has a desperately low standard of living, which must fall steadily. But up to the present this is reflected less clearly in politics than might be expected. Communism has not yet begun to exploit the misery of the Middle East. The Communist parties in the Arab countries are peculiar in that they are organizations of the upper class; they scarcely trouble to marshal mass support, and look forward to gaining power, not by a vast civil war such as was fought by Mao Tse-tung in China, nor by a conspiracy of organized workers, such as brought victory to Lenin, but by being better disciplined than any other political party, and thus able by political adroitness to seize authority at a time of political breakdown. It is a different pattern from that of the Communist parties in Asia, which have carried on the movements of so-called peoples' liberation.

This is a peculiar circumstance and it may not last. The hungry masses may be brought into politics. When either the Communist Party, or some rival, turns to the people, and plays on their wretchedness to stir up feeling, the volcano in the Middle East may erupt even hotter lava than in the past.



*The crisis which came to a head in November developed in a succession of episodes. They were curiously like the scenes of a Greek tragedy, each leading up to a catastrophe whose end was apparent in advance to the spectator if not to the actors, but which the spectator could do nothing to avert. With each episode the drama became more complex, the issue more inevitable.*

*Aristotle said that an essential of Greek tragedy was that it shows a change from prosperity to its reverse, and shows it as a 'probable or necessary sequence of events'. From the point of view of Britain, that has been the spectacle of the Middle East in the past few years. 'Such incidents,' said Aristotle, 'have the greatest effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly but at the same time in consequence of one another.' That, too, was the story of the Middle East crisis. Nor was the tragic hero lacking, the man 'in enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity', who brings misfortune 'not by vice and depravity but by some great error on his part'.*

*Most of the drama was centred in the Arab countries. But the first episode was not there but in Persia; it was the nationalization of oil. The sequence which was to end with an act of nationalization, the seizure of the Suez Canal, had begun with a rather similar act in Tehran. The following chapter describes, sketchily and very briefly, the series of events by which the stage was set for 1956 – and for what still lies ahead.*



## *Part Two*

# EIGHT STEPS TO THE CRISIS, 1951-6

## 1

### *Persian Oil*

THE first episode, which happened in Persia, foreshadowed what was to come in other parts of the Middle East. Xenophobia, a demagogic dictator, assassins, the absence of stabilizing political forces such as in India were supplied by the Congress party – these were elements which were later to be found repeated in the Arab countries.

The Persian drama was all the more an epitome of Middle East discord because it was not only an expression of hostility to the West but was also an attack upon that typical institution of the Middle East in the mid twentieth century, the foreign oil company. The oil companies, with all their ramifying structures, had grown up because the sophisticated technical operation of the extraction and distribution of oil had to be carried on in a region which was relatively backward in political and social organization. It was a twentieth century intrusion into a society still chiefly medieval.

The oil companies had grown in a comparatively short space of time from small beginnings into very complex organizations, with vast wealth. By the end of the second world war the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company controlled the largest tanker fleet in the world, owned at Abadan the largest refinery, and made a significant contribution to British finance in dividends and taxes. The oil companies were obliged to take on political responsibilities in the territories in which they operated, and since the economy of the states depended so much on them they negotiated with their governments almost like one sovereign power with another; but they professed to regard this with regret and claimed that they would be happier if they were purely commercial organizations, engaged simply in extracting and distributing oil. Certainly they showed less political foresight and tact than might have been expected of genuinely political organizations. This was



the more unfortunate because too often the Western governments allowed the oil companies to give the appearance that they were acting on their behalf. At one stage the position of the oil companies resembled rather closely that of the East India Company in India in the period when the Indian governments were crumbling, and the Company was at first unwilling to become their successor; but of course, in the conditions of the twentieth century, they could not go on to play the same political part as did the East India Company. Instead, because of their power and wealth, they became a main target of nationalist animosity.

The oldest of these institutions in the Middle East was the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and it was against this that the storm first broke.

The oil drama began abruptly, but it had been prepared by years of worsening bitterness in Persia against the West. The occupation by Britain and Russia during the war had been a humiliation; weak government, which followed the fall of the dictator Reza Shah, enabled mullahs and gang leaders to exploit the spreading hatred. During the Persian drama, nearly everybody concerned – Dr Musaddiq, the Shah, members of the Majlis, army officers – lived in fear of murder. This distorted their political behaviour. In the safety of London or Washington it is not easy to keep this in mind.

The Persian crisis began with one of these assassinations. Early in 1951 a member of the gang called the Fidayan-I-Islam shot the prime minister, General Razmara. This opened the way for the accession to power of Dr Musaddiq, who at that moment reflected almost perfectly the angry anti-Western temper of the country. Because he did so, and because members of the Majlis – the parliament – feared that they might follow General Razmara if they opposed him, he was able to get a majority vote in the parliament, and to retain it, even though precariously, for three years.

Dr Musaddiq's personality and career are fascinating. It is a pity that on his eventual fall no detailed analysis was presented to the British public. A great deal could have been learned about how to deal with Middle East dictators. He had a peculiar character. He was well born and very rich; he was a landowner and was related to the deposed Qajar dynasty of Persia. He was a hysteric, like Hitler. When thwarted, he burst into tears. He was



a hypochondriac. While he was causing commotion throughout the world he spent much of his time in bed, received ambassadors and journalists at his bed-side, and from there directed his devastating moves. Why was so strange a politician able to make so much havoc? It was because he was felt by much of the educated class of Persia to be the personification of its mood.

The gesture against the West took the form of the nationalization of oil. This was the perfect symbol for Musaddiq's purposes. The oil company was foreign; it was prosperous; it had made huge and notorious profits out of Persia; it excluded Persian employees from the higher levels of management; it was tactless; it made larger payments to the British Treasury than to the Persian.<sup>1</sup> The Persians resented it because they felt that its whole existence was the result of a trick; a concession had been granted originally to a private individual and had passed into the hands of a company in which a foreign government – Britain – was the largest shareholder. These facts blinded Persians to the genuine benefits which Persia gained from the Company's operations; and since the Company took an old-fashioned view about publicity, hardly anybody in Persia knew anything about labour conditions in the oilfields or about the equitable financial terms which the Company had offered to Persia in more recent years. Persians knew about their own conditions, which were miserable, and they learned from their rich governing class that it was all the fault of foreign exploiters of the national resources.

It is unnecessary to describe the oil crisis in detail. For three years Musaddiq seemed to carry all before him, and during all this time the crisis continued. The Majlis, though it feared his demagoguery and disliked his ascendancy, dared not vote against him. Repeatedly it tried to build coalitions against him, but always at the last moment enough members supported him out of fear of what would happen to them if they did not do so. At the general

1. This arose from the fact that the company engaged in many activities and made substantial profits which had nothing to do with Persia. But since the Company presented its accounts in such a way as to obscure the fact, the Persians were not alone to blame for the flourishing of the grievance. A special grievance rose out of the secrecy about the price of oil supplied to the British Admiralty, which was known to buy at a reduced rate.



election, Dr Musaddiq, partly through pressure on the electorate by provincial governors, won an impressive majority. On one occasion, when a vote in the Majlis forced him to resign, his allies, the nationalist gangs, started huge riots in Tehran, and he was readmitted to office. The Shah was terrified.

When the oil company was assailed, the dispute passed rapidly from being one between the Persian government and a commercial corporation into one between Persia and Britain. The British government was involved because it had the right and the duty to protect British citizens and interests. It had a direct and substantial financial interest in the property affected. It was conscious of other interests in the Middle East which might be similarly threatened unless a strong stand were made for the sanctity of contracts. And it had strategic interests of the highest importance in the Middle East generally. It was significant for much of what was to happen later that although the American government had the same strategic interests it took a different view of how to secure them. It hoped to associate Persia in its security system, and the quarrel between Britain and Persia seemed therefore a considerable nuisance. There was at first an inclination to blame Britain for throwing a spanner into the works.

During 1951 there was a series of negotiations with the Persian government – by the oil company, by an emissary of the American President who sought to mediate, and by a British delegation led by a Cabinet Minister. No settlement resulted because, although both sides professed their willingness to discuss, they began from irreconcilable bases. Persia refused to discuss the validity of nationalization and was prepared only to discuss the amount of compensation to be paid to the expropriated company in respect of its tangible assets. The British, taking their stand on the concession agreement, insisted that nationalization was a wrongful act; and when they came to accept nationalization, their claim for compensation included a sum for the wrongful determination of the concession.

There was always an alternative to negotiation, namely force. The British made a show of force but, as has become plain later, were never prepared to use it except for the protection of British citizens. Whatever military advice the cabinet may have received about the practicability of occupying Abadan, the



government never seriously considered taking such action. There were doubts about the justification of a resort to arms to uphold a commercial agreement and doubts about the wisdom of action which would imperil the American alliance and might raise a turmoil from which the Russians alone would profit. There was also the fear that the Persians might retaliate by blowing up the refinery at Abadan. But since force was not to be used, and since the Persians began to threaten the Company's servants in Persia, it became necessary to evacuate them. At first the British government set its face against evacuation and stated categorically that no evacuation would be ordered; but finally the humiliating order had to be given. Diplomatic relations between Britain and Persia were broken off. The signs of the hated Western privileges were removed.

In 1953 Musaddiq was at the peak of his triumph. But in the end he over-reached himself. He quarrelled with some of the terrorist leaders, such as the mullah Kashani, who had begun to threaten him as they had threatened his predecessors. The violence of his nationalism forced him towards the left, even though he had personally little interest in social reform; and his quarrels with the West forced him towards closer relations with Russia, which, in the popular mind in Persia, is the hereditary national enemy, and, because it is contiguous with Persia, more dangerous than the Western countries.

This sapped Musaddiq's position. What overthrew him finally was economic causes. The oil industry had been nationalized, and the British driven out, but Persian oil proved not to be indispensable to the world. The new Persian company found few customers; and those that it did find were successfully attacked by the British company in law courts in different parts of the world on the grounds that the Persian company was not the rightful owner of the oil. As a consequence the Persian treasury grew emptier and emptier. By his intemperance Musaddiq denied himself foreign aid. America and the International Bank both refused him funds, and he had in the end to turn for supply to the very company against which he was carrying on his feud. Western countries, while very wisely refusing to take any military action against Musaddiq, virtually applied economic sanctions, though this was unavowed. In the language of the time it



was described as 'creeping up on him'. For many months he managed to get along while practically insolvent, and at first it was supposed that the economic factors had been over-rated by the prophets who had said that they would bring about his downfall; but in the end they ruined him. He had been given a long rope, and in the end hanged himself.

The end came in the summer of 1953. Musaddiq, sensing that the opposition against him was increasing, tried to bring about the abdication of the Shah, who by reason of his office was the rallying point of the dissidents. That was the culmination. Encouraged by the army, the Shah in August dismissed Musaddiq. The mob in Tehran rose; the Shah fled; his palaces were invaded. But General Zahedi, the chief of staff, had escaped from Tehran, and from a hiding place in the provinces rallied the army. Though Musaddiq had tried to bring the army under his own control, by arrests and purges and by building up cells, he had not succeeded, and the bulk of it turned against him. The issue was decided in street fights between the army and the mob. The army won, the Shah returned, and General Zahedi became prime minister.

There followed a rapid fall of tension. Persian national feeling had had its fling. The country was tired. It was glad to return to normal life. The Majlis welcomed the relief from melodrama. In renewed negotiations with the West the new Persian government did not abandon its demands for nationalizing the oil, but it showed a spirit of compromise, to which the West, chastened by experience, responded. Agreement was reached. Persian relations with Russia became cool.

The oil settlement took the form of a treaty between the Persian government, the Persian National Oil Company, and a consortium of eight American, British, and French oil companies. The agreement left intact the Persian nationalization decree; the Persian company took over two minor refineries and the distribution in Persia of oil products. But under an agreement which was to run for twenty-five years (with possibilities of renewal up to a further fifteen) the consortium was to buy all the oil it wanted from the Persian company. The Anglo-Iranian company received compensation of £25 million, a forty per cent interest in the consortium, and further undisclosed sums from the seven other



companies which now joined it in the Persian business. The consortium created two new companies, the one to produce and explore for oil in Persia and the other to run the refinery at Abadan. Both these companies are registered in the Netherlands and are in turn wholly owned subsidiaries of another new company registered in London. Each of the two operating companies has seven directors, two of whom are Persian. As a result of this arrangement Persian susceptibilities were soothed and the West got what it wanted, the oil.

The Western governments, sighing with relief at such a satisfactory end, may have hoped for a moment that the crisis in the Middle East was over; but observers who did so had not drawn the obvious conclusions from the Persian episode. Persia had made popular the idea of nationalizing the assets of the West; it had shown that it was possible for a Middle Eastern country to challenge the West and escape military retribution. It might surely have been realized that this would lead to other acts of defiance and nationalization. But this was not understood. Neither, unhappily, was it appreciated that in Persia the West had discovered the art of riding the Middle Eastern storm. The Western countries failed to draw from the Persian episode the conclusions which they might have found reassuring and flattering to their own conduct. By refraining from military action, they had avoided major conflict; they had discovered that unreason can be countered successfully by non-military means. How melancholy that the same means were not later to be used in the case of Colonel Nasser.

## 2

### *Revolution in Egypt*

BY the time the convulsion in Persia had ended, a long-drawn-out conflict had begun in Egypt; and thereafter Egypt and the Arab lands were to be the centre. The struggle began as one between nationalism and British privilege. It was to cause greater domestic changes in Egypt than had happened in Persia, and its consequences for the world were to be more considerable.



Nationalism in Egypt has a long history. It had really begun in Cairo in the seventies, before Britain occupied Egypt. It had its roots in religion; it was an Arab movement for preserving Islam by regenerating it, and it was associated with the ancient university, Al Azhar, and with an extraordinary immigrant leader named Al Afghani. He was one of the great creative personalities of Islamic civilization, and it is strange how little curiosity there has been about him in the West. Fusing with this religious ardour was a purely political movement of national feeling, which had begun as an offshoot of Western nationalism in the consultative assembly set up by the Khedive Ismail.<sup>1</sup>

In 1881 Britain occupied Egypt. Its impelling motive was strategic. At that time Britain had little desire for a Middle East empire, nor were the economic resources of the region dreamed of; the object was to guard the communications with India; the Suez Canal was to be the thread through all Britain's relations with Egypt. Occupation was not annexation; the local Egyptian government (under a royal family of Albanian origin) continued under British tutelage. It cannot seriously be denied that Egypt gained materially a great deal from the British supervision. Moreover, British arms reconquered in Egypt's name the great dependency, the Sudan. But tutelage gave naturally a fillip to national feeling. From the early days of the occupation there began a national resistance, expressed in demonstrations, rioting, and perennial violence by students. After the first world war this purely Egyptian nationalism was reinforced by the Arab national sentiments which had been released by the fall of the Turkish Empire.

Between 1882 and 1922 Britain declared sixty-six times its intention of withdrawing from Egypt, but the frequency of their repetition robbed the British words of credence. From 1919 on-

1. Arab nationalism in most of the Arab countries was at this stage directed against Turkey; and the Arabs, especially the Christian ones, looked to the Western countries as possible patrons. But some of the Westerners who had an imperialist disposition were content that the maintenance of the empire in the Middle East should continue to be carried on by the Turks. The Turks incurred the unpopularity; and the West, because of extraterritorial privilege from the capitulations, escaped the disadvantages of Turkish rule.



wards Britain undertook a slow withdrawal from its position of authority, yielding step by step before the pressure of Egyptian nationalism, whose main instrument was the party called the Wafd. The protectorate was ended and converted into an alliance. After the treaty of 1936 British rights in Egypt were limited to stationing a force in the fairly small area called the Canal Zone.<sup>1</sup> At first sight this British privilege might not seem excessive. The treaty specified that the presence of British troops did not constitute an occupation, nor did it prejudice Egypt's sovereign rights. The purpose of the force was to ensure free navigation of the Suez Canal, defined in the treaty as an integral part of Egypt though a universal link between parts of the British Empire. The stationing of the force was to lapse at any time after 1956 when the Egyptian army was recognized as capable of protecting the canal.<sup>2</sup>

Why did Britain set so much store by this agreement? Why was Egypt so much to resent it? It was partly because in the course of time the treaty changed its meaning. When it was negotiated, the purpose had been to safeguard the canal. But by degrees the purpose came to be thought of as the securing of a base by whose means Britain might maintain its military power throughout the Middle East. The Canal Zone became transformed into a Middle East base, for which it was held to be peculiarly well suited geographically. The zone is situated at land, air, and sea junctions of great importance; the route from Asia to Africa crosses there the route from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean.

In military thinking at the time when the crisis became acute – in 1951 – there seemed to be no better point from which to contain or sustain operations in any part of the large area comprising

1. This provision had been obnoxious even at that time to Egyptian nationalism. But it was accepted because Egypt was very much afraid of Mussolini, and the British force offered protection.

2. The treaty promised a perpetual alliance but promised that it could be revised after twenty years. If at this time there was disagreement between Britain and Egypt about the competence of the Egyptian army to protect the canal, the dispute was to be referred to an arbitrator acceptable to both parties. An annex to the treaty put the British force in the zone at 10,000. From the beginning of the war until 1954 the British force was much larger than this.



the Balkans, Turkey, the Arab countries, and Persia. In the Cold War with Russia this area was of crucial account since it contained so much of the oil on which the economy of Western Europe depended. The oil had to be safeguarded. The occupation of the base seemed, in Western eyes, the best means of doing so.

It should not be thought that the British government or generals formed this view lightly. True, some of their attachment to the Middle East came out of false enchantment, or from tradition, and because a national folk-lore had grown up round the Suez Canal. But it had also grounds which were more substantial. The Middle East really was vital. The Russians could damage the Western powers more seriously in the Middle East than they could do in Korea or Indo-China. For in the Middle East the wounds could be lethal.

The trouble about this strategic plan was that it left Egyptian nationalism out of account. On the Egyptian side the guiding aim was that no British soldier should remain on Egyptian soil. The treaty might say that the presence of British troops did not infringe Egyptian sovereignty, but no Egyptian saw it like that. No Egyptian government would regard the treaty of 1936 as anything but a half-way house to the realization of Egypt's aim – which was the disappearance of all British troops.

Egypt had started pressing again for treaty revision as soon as the second world war was over. It possessed an advantage in that Ernest Bevin, the Labour Foreign Secretary, was fascinated by the Middle East and made it a prime aim of policy to win Arab friendship. Without a settlement with Egypt this was impossible. Moreover, a British government which withdrew entirely from India could hardly refuse entirely to listen to Arab complaints. Already in 1946 Britain had worked out the concept which was to govern all later negotiations; British forces would withdraw gradually from the zone and base, but on condition that they should be allowed to return in an international emergency and that the vast stores and installations at the base – which were valued at more than £500 million – should be kept at their disposal. Negotiation was begun on these lines, and for a time seemed promising, but broke down because a majority of the Egyptian negotiators felt that they could not present this solution to Egyptian public opinion.



This was not the only subject of discord. Egypt demanded also the withdrawal of Britain from the Sudan, the huge territory which it had governed virtually as a British Crown Colony, though it was technically an Anglo-Egyptian condominium. Egypt's hope was that after the British had departed, the Sudan would become again an Egyptian dependency, as it had been before the revolt of the Mahdi.

These abortive negotiations took place before 1951. But 1951 was the crucial year. From then began the series of occurrences which were to end in the British and French invasion of Egypt. Persia had shown how Britain might be defied. The Korean war distracted the West. The Arabs were recovering from the shock of the Israeli war.

The first move came from the West – from Britain, America, and France combined. Their initial aim was to build in the Middle East the same kind of barrier against Russian advance which they had set up in Western Europe. They proposed to Egypt, and to other countries of the Middle East, the formation of a comprehensive military alliance, to be called the Middle East Defence Organization. This was to be a copy and extension of Nato. There was to be a bait for Egypt, because if it would enter into this new treaty, its hated defence alliance with Britain might be swallowed up in it. But in Egypt, and in all the Arab countries, the proposal was very badly received. It was seen as a device to make the Arab countries the puppets of the West. Already neutralist sentiment was strong in the Middle East, although its doctrines had not then been formulated as clearly as they were to be later. MEDO was still-born.

With the MEDO plan rejected, Egypt turned from diplomacy to action. The main popular party, the Wafd, was well organized. It had cells in the towns and large villages in the Canal Zone. These organized the harrying of British troops; and in this they received help from the Egyptian police. Egyptian ministers worked up popular feeling and in January 1952 there came an explosion. The mob of Cairo rose and attacked British buildings and residents. In an Eastern city, mob action can be very terrifying. The events in Cairo on what was to be remembered as 'Black Saturday' repeated those in Calcutta and the centres of the great Indian killings a few years previously. But after much



damage had been done, the riot was checked suddenly. King Farouk became alarmed that the mob would turn against his throne. Abruptly he called in the army and dismissed the Wafd government.

King Farouk had at first delayed action because he was not sure whether the Egyptian army would obey his orders to suppress the mob. He had feared that it might mutiny, and was relieved when it did its duty. But later it was to be discovered that the army had obeyed the king only because its own plan for revolt had not by then been completed.

The army was about to become the centre of Egypt's political life because the other institutions of government had been discredited. The Wafd, and the politicians of other parties, were known to be extremely corrupt. The king was worse. Farouk equalled some of the more notorious Indian Maharajahs in his apolastic way of life; he was surrounded by retainers who dabbled in politics and public finance; and he allowed himself to be cut off from the large, organized political parties. His courtiers were supposed to have been responsible for mismanagement in the army, for promoting bad officers and blocking good ones; they had made fortunes by contracts in arms which resulted in the Egyptian army finding itself with decrepit weapons during the war with Israel. For the inglorious results of that war there was one thought in the mind of many patriotic officers:

'We can no more.

'The King, the King's to blame.'

The discontent, at first diffused and ineffective, led to the formation of a small group of officers bent on action. Groups of this sort have been a feature of Moslem armies in the Middle East. Groups in the Turkish army which were associated with the Young Turk party forced the first successful reforms upon the Ottoman Empire. In Egypt, the officers who conspired were nearly all young men who had fought in the field in the war with Israel.<sup>1</sup> They were of middle rank, majors and lieutenant colonels, and most of them came, not from the families of the great landlords, who on the whole despised military service, but from the

1. Amid their disasters and frustrations there, they came to the conclusion that they could do nothing until a change had been made at Cairo. 'The biggest battlefield,' said one of them, 'is in Egypt.'



lower middle class. They knew poverty. They came often from villages where life was grindingly hard. They had had to work their way competitively through military schools, and they had been galled to see the easy road open to the rich. The shrewdest among them was Abdul Gamel Nasser. The most attractive of the group was a senior officer, General Neguib, whom they had brought in, not for his abilities, but because he was so amiable and would make a likeable figure-head. He was never of their inner councils.

The officers laid their plans cleverly and secretly. In July 1952 they struck. The carrying out of their conspiracy, their secret meetings, their dispositions on the fateful night, the success with hardly a shot fired, the smooth co-ordination between Cairo and Alexandria, have been described in an attractive little book by General Neguib. Farouk was captured without any serious resistance, and was allowed, rather surprisingly, to escape with his life. His palaces, with remarkable collections of pornography and knick-knacks, were turned into a public show, which gave the people of Cairo a tangible first fruit of revolution.

When the officers had made their rising, they had been afraid that the British might intervene on behalf of King Farouk. But the king was too discredited for that. The British government at first expressed sympathy with the new Egyptian régime. It felt that its new broom might sweep away some of the regrettable past, and that it might be easier to deal with soldiers than with wily politicians.

Colonel Nasser, the real head of the army revolt, who was to replace Neguib and to become openly the head of the government, is an interesting controversial character. Possibly he has not received justice from onlookers. His little book, *Egypt's Liberation*, is engaging, though naïve. The comparison between it and *Mein Kampf* could only be made by somebody who had read one of these works at the most. Though he is an author, he is not bookish, or a man of ideas. He is satisfied with unvarnished nationalism, and takes pleasure in stories of national revolts against foreign oppressors. He is especially fascinated by tales of the Irish rebels against Britain. He is not personally attractive like General Neguib, but he has a cool head and a natural understanding of politics. He has humour. At times he has shown an



instinct to moderation, though it may wear thin. His outbursts of temper give the impression of being under control. He calculates. He has been sparing of life, not because he has warm sympathies, but probably because, if it seems indifferent whether an individual is spared or not, he sees no reason why he should not be spared.

The officers who were his associates were a diverse group. Hardly any had had political experience. They were not at home in cosmopolitan life, as many of the politicians had been; and felt ill at ease with the sophisticated and at the same time despised them. Hence their dislike of many British diplomats. One or two had interested themselves in Communism, which they understood in an over-simplified way. In their first months they were conscious of their lack of knowledge, and, regarding themselves as the custodians of the nation's morals rather than as its administrators, they at first looked for expert civilians who would govern under their tutelage. But they soon came to think of themselves as the equals or superiors of the civilians whom they called to their aid, and then discarded.<sup>1</sup>

To keep their hold on power, they engaged in a number of rough struggles, and used revolutionary tribunals as an instrument of repression. Yet at first they remained surprisingly moderate, and continued to look forward to the day when their rule could be turned into a form of constitutional government, though they were not clear about what form this should take.

1. Nasser describes their experience vividly in his book. 'Before 23 July I had imagined that the whole nation was ready and prepared, waiting for nothing but a vanguard to lead the charge against the battlements. Our role (that of the army) was to be this commando vanguard. I thought that this role would not take more than a few hours. Then immediately would come the sacred advance behind us of the serried ranks and the thunder of marching feet. Then suddenly came reality after 23 July. Crowds did eventually come, and they came in endless droves – but how different is the reality from the dream. The masses that came were disunited, divided groups of stragglers. We set about seeking the views of leaders of opinion and the experience of those who were experienced. Every man we questioned had nothing to recommend except to kill someone else. If we had gone along with everybody we heard, we would have killed off all the people and torn down every idea, and there would have been nothing left for us to do but sit down among corpses and ruins.'



They jettisoned General Neguib when he showed a disposition to allow the return of parliamentary government and the political parties. To seek for a legitimate basis of government, and to seek in vain, has been the curse of many military dictatorships which began with good intentions. Colonel Nasser has an affinity with Oliver Cromwell. His experiments ended with a bogus constitution and a popular assembly, with controlled elections, so that he was eventually elected as president with a majority of 97 per cent – a figure which recalled the elections in Nazi Germany. It was unfortunate that he allowed some of his German advisers – ex-Nazis – to be conspicuous, and that some of the symbols and insignia of the revolution looked like those of the Nazis. For the Arabs, the Nazi system had never been as discredited as it was for Europe.

As they became more caught up in international affairs, the officers lost their earlier zest for social justice, and reform began to take second place. The land reform which they had rather spectacularly begun, and about which they made much propaganda, turned out to be little more than the partial expropriation of the great pashas, who were unpopular because most of them were of Turkish descent, and a survival of the old régime. There was little effective redistribution of land at a lower level. Increasingly the régime took on the familiar look of military dictatorships – with the dictator looking rather fruitlessly for popular policies.

## 3

*Anglo-Egyptian Treaties*

SOON after the revolution in Egypt, Britain resumed the negotiations. The new Egyptian leaders had appreciated the British restraint while they were carrying out their plot; some had been at Sandhurst and most had had close contacts with the British army. The new personal relationship between the negotiators seemed likely to be helpful. But the Egyptian officers, though inexperienced, and though often diverted by crises in domestic politics – in the course of which they overthrew General Neguib –



did not abate any of the Egyptian demands. The talks were more than once suspended; and the Egyptians threatened to resume guerilla action in the Canal Zone. In the end the Egyptians gained most of what they had asked for.

True, they did not secure sole sovereignty over the Sudan. Britain refused the cession. But it accelerated greatly the pace of the Sudanese advance to full self-government, promising to leave it to the Sudanese to decide for themselves whether they wished to be independent or to be linked with Egypt.<sup>1</sup> An agreement on these lines was made with the Egyptians in February 1953. The Egyptians were fairly satisfied; they relied – probably too much – on being able to influence the Sudanese decision by bribes and intrigues.

To come to terms upon the other issue, the evacuation of the base, took another year and a half. Britain's proposal had been that the former treaty should be replaced by a military agreement lasting for a limited term, under which Britain would be given the right to re-occupy the zone and base in an emergency; it had agreed to evacuate the British army, but had hoped to induce Egypt to agree to the continuance of a token or skeleton force, which would keep the base installations in readiness. Ultimately Britain had to agree to much less. The agreement reached in July 1954 provided for a total withdrawal of British troops over a period of twenty months. Britain was given the right to return to the base, but only in case of an attack, by any country except Israel, on any member of the Arab League or on Turkey.

Installations were to be maintained, not by the British army, but by civilian technicians employed by British and French civil firms. Egypt also reaffirmed the Constantinople Convention guaranteeing the unimpeded passage of ships through the Suez Canal.<sup>2</sup>

1. The rate of constitutional advance in the Sudan was extraordinarily fast. Not until 1948 was there a legislative assembly with an elected majority. By 1954 the Sudan was free.

2. A little before the agreement was made, Egypt had arrested the Israeli ship *Bat Galim* in the Canal. Egypt may argue that since its reaffirmation of the Constantinople Convention was accepted, Britain had tacitly agreed that Egypt was not infringing the Convention by the blockading of Israel.



The agreement ended a period in history. It marked the finish of British military ascendancy in the Middle East; the British bases which remained – in Jordan and Iraq – lost much of their importance. Britain might build a new base in Cyprus, but it was not expected to be a replica of the base in the Canal Zone. Changes in military prospects had helped the British government to make its decision; in a war fought with hydrogen bombs, a base so near Russia as the Suez one might have proved a death trap. It was argued that dispersed and small bases had become more necessary than a single comprehensive one. In spite of this, the change was great. The British were leaving their ramparts in the Middle East; the British power was in retreat. Sensitive eyes were aware of a great reversal:

‘The god Hercules,  
‘Had left him that had loved him well.’

Britain was letting go its actual physical hold upon the Suez Canal, its lifeline. There was satisfaction throughout all Eastern countries (except Israel), for whom the ending of Western imperial ascendancy still seemed to be the chief task of the age. The interested governments speculated on the shifts which might follow, and began to prepare their next moves. Fear grew in Israel because the British forces at Suez had been a reassuring barrier between it and Egypt.

During the negotiations, Britain was several times encouraged by the United States to make concessions, and from time to time the American ambassador at Cairo constituted himself an informal mediator. American policy was vacillating, but a basic American belief was that the prime element in the transactions was the struggle of nationalism against imperialism, in which American sympathy ought to be at least partly on the side of nationalism. It was the old Jeffersonian tradition in American politics, and by an interesting chance the name of the American ambassador in Cairo in the crucial place of the negotiations was Jefferson Caffery. With a strange obtuseness, Mr Dulles, on a visit to Cairo, gave a silver-plated pistol to Colonel Nasser as a present. It was at a moment of tension between Egypt and Britain. Arabs drew their conclusions. Some onlookers in Britain believed that they could detect behind the American liberalism the interest of



oil circles and would-be imperialists in America, who saw in the conflict an opportunity to replace British by American influence. But this was too suspicious and out of date.

The negotiations and their result had a further consequence – in British politics – which was to grow larger and larger, and was to prove a main cause of the final catastrophe. Sir Anthony Eden, in agreeing to the evacuation, came under fire from a section of the Conservative Party. The climate in Britain had changed from what it had been in the first post-war days when Empire seemed dead and discredited, and when most people in Britain wanted to withdraw from imperial responsibilities with the least damage but as rapidly as possible. In 1947 most of the Conservative Party had accepted the departure from India, even if with sentimental reluctance; but in 1954 a strong section of it would not agree as easily to the departure from Egypt. In the intervening years a new national feeling had grown up in Britain; and the nationalist leaders of the Orient, who had assumed that Britain was retreating everywhere, failed to recognize its strength. In the eyes of Arabs, the evacuation of Egypt might be simply a renunciation by Britain of what did not belong to it; but in the eyes of many people in Britain, the claims of Egypt were an assault upon Britain's rights, which they felt must at some stage be resisted. Britain had been educated for decades to think of the acquisition of the Suez Canal as a master stroke of Disraeli, and a folk-lore had grown up about it.<sup>1</sup> The section of the Conservative Party which opposed Eden played upon this. It said also that by the evacuation Eden was relinquishing the sanctions upon which oil supplies and Britain's economic viability ultimately depended.

The Conservative opposition, which became known as the Suez rebels, was at first small. But it had sympathizers. They were able to delay the negotiations. A rumour spread that Sir Winston Churchill, at the time still prime minister, was not entirely opposed to them, and whether or not this was true it may have encouraged them. The group was also supported by those whose prime concern in the Middle East was to safeguard Israel, since it could be represented that if the British force was withdrawn from the

1. Probably most English people, if asked, would admit that they thought that Britain had had a hand in the construction of the Canal. Actually the British government had opposed the undertaking.



Canal Zone nothing would stand in the way of Egypt's war of revenge and extermination.

Their resistance was overborne, and Eden concluded the treaty. But the circumstances were ominous. To get the agreement through Parliament, Eden had to claim that it was a justifiable gamble that by yielding to Nasser's demand it would be possible to win Nasser's friendship. The Suez group said that it was an illusion. In effect, Eden staked his political reputation on saying that it was not.

Unfortunately, events did not vindicate him. They might have done so in the long run, but in the short run Nasser was not transformed as had been hoped. Eden had probably hoped that, if Britain agreed to the treaty, Nasser would come into the defensive alliances of the West, but he showed no disposition to do so. Though Nasser is not as turbulent as he is now represented, he – like Mr Nehru in his early years – is often irresponsibly ungarded in his speech. He continued to make taunts and gibes at Britain; so did the Cairo radio. A British prime minister need not have minded them as long as they were unaccompanied by action. But Nasser's hand and propaganda were seen behind anti-British agitation in all the Arab countries; this played into the hands of the Suez group, which claimed that it proved that Eden had been wrong. Eden felt himself betrayed by Nasser; his future was threatened. To Eden it was the more galling because nearly two decades earlier he had made his political reputation by standing up to the European dictators and by separating himself from the appeasement policies of the Chamberlain government. Now Eden was being denounced by the Suez group as an appeaser – and an ineffective one. Eden, one of the most emotional prime ministers whom this country has known, seems to have come step by step to feel implacable anger against Nasser. He saw Middle East politics as a duel between himself and Nasser. He became convinced that British interests, and world peace, required that Nasser should be put down.



*Baghdad Alliance*

A FEW months after the making of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, new events had occurred in another sequence which widened very greatly the stage upon which the drama was unfolding. From then on many new characters and interests began to play a part. Complexity increased.

One of the reasons why Colonel Nasser could not be reconciled to Britain, even after the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, was that, whether he desired it or not, he became the leader and symbol of those who wished Egypt to unify, or at least to lead, the Arab lands. Britain stood in the way at various points, but especially because it supported as its client state the second most powerful Arab country, Iraq. Egypt, in order to advance its ambitions, which it was impelled to do by the driving forces of the age, came thus once more in conflict with Britain. It was a new and second quarrel. Egypt had to break the links between Iraq and Britain.

The Arab world to-day is rather like Germany a hundred years ago, at least superficially. It is divided into a number of sovereign states, some greater, some less. Among the intelligentsia is the conviction that the state of affairs is transitory, and that somehow Arabia should be unified, either by federation or by the triumph of one of the Arab countries over the others. As in Germany, the resistance from the so-called particularist groups is strong. Unification would destroy many vested interests. But the aspiration to unify is genuine. The expression of it was the formation in 1945 of the Arab League, the loose consultative union of Arab governments, but the League discredited itself in the post-war years by its ineffectiveness. In all the countries the intelligentsia feel less loyalty to their own government than to whoever is able to claim to be the leader of the united Arab people.

For some time, Colonel Nasser made no such claim. He is an Egyptian; his own instincts were to limit himself to reforming Egypt. Traditionally, the Egyptians have been the least Arab of Arabs, and have concerned themselves least with racial unity. They think of themselves as the heirs of the Pharaohs as well as being the heirs of the Prophet – just as the Persians like to think



of themselves as carrying on the empire of the King of Kings. During his early years in power, Nasser preferred to be acclaimed as a new Rameses, whose statues he rather resembled, than as a new Caliph. But the forces of the time were too strong, and in the past two years the ambitions of Nasser and his government have grown. He is called upon from many sides to be the Bismarck of Arabia, and to unite its peoples from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup>

Nasser described in his book how the idea of Egypt's destiny presented itself to him:

'I recall a famous tale by Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The pages of history are full of heroes who created for themselves roles of glorious valour which they played at decisive moments. Likewise the pages are full of heroic and glorious roles which never found heroes to perform them. It seems to me that in the Arab circle there is a role wandering in search of a hero. This role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country, and is beckoning to us to move, to take up its lines, to put on its costume, since no one else is qualified to play it.'

Just at the moment that these ambitions were forming themselves, Britain took a step which threatened to kill them at birth. It became party to a defensive treaty which had been concluded in February 1955 between Turkey and Iraq. By this, it created the Baghdad Pact, to which other Middle East countries were invited to adhere. It was a new, and, as it proved, very disturbing factor.

The alliance had a peculiar history. It had grown out of an

1. But because Egypt is in Africa and not Asia, Nasser himself is as much interested in heading a movement for African emancipation as for Arab unity. Hence came the broadcasts from Cairo to Kenya in Swahili which increased the ill-will for Nasser, and hence his inflammatory claims to be the patron of all the black peoples struggling to be free. How little the Egyptians a hundred years ago were thought of as Arabs is brought out sharply in a passage in Robert Curzon's *Monasteries in the Levant*. Some Arabs in Palestine accosted a party of Europeans who were wearing Egyptian dress and were mistaken as Egyptians. 'Oh Oh ye Egyptians,' said the Arabs, 'what are you doing here in our country? What reason have ye for being here? For we are Arabs, and this is our country and our land. Ye are Egyptians, arrant Cairoites are ye all.'



idea first advanced by Dulles, after he had realized that the MEDO scheme was abortive as a means of giving stability to the oil-bearing region. MEDO had been ill-conceived because it tried to join all the countries of the Middle East into a single alliance which was obviously directed against Russia. Some of these countries lay far away from Russia's threatening armies, and did not feel themselves at all threatened. Egypt was an example, and Egypt took the lead in rejecting the scheme. But the countries in the North which were adjacent to Russia – the countries which it became the fashion to call the Northern Tier – were very much afraid, partly because they had seen the fate of Russia's neighbours in Europe, and partly because they believed that Russian agents stirred up their minority groups.

Dulles sought to promote a military union of these countries as a substitute for MEDO; and as MEDO had aroused the suspicion that it was intended to be a puppet organization of the Western great powers, he kept the United States aloof from the alliance, though it was understood that American aid might be available to it.<sup>1</sup>

The first members of this new grouping were Pakistan and Turkey. Thus at the start its founder members were non-Arab; and Arab affairs and the problem of Israel had little to do with it. The next step came when Turkey proposed a treaty with Iraq; and Iraq, at that moment much alarmed by Russian intrigues with the Kurds, accepted rather abruptly and surprisingly, and signed what has become known as the Baghdad Pact. The terms of the alliance were vague. The parties agreed to co-operate for their security and defence. The military details of this common action were to be worked out in separate agreements.

The inclusion of an Arab country in the alliance gave it a new character. But even that change was not as great as the one which was to follow – the inclusion of Great Britain. By the admission of one of the Western great powers, the alliance took on a new character and purpose.

1. Whether the alliance was wisely conceived as a military means was open to doubt. Did it increase the defensibility of the Middle East? Was it likely to deter Russia? It is arguable that a better deterrent would have been a statement by the Great Powers that any invasion by Russia in force would involve the danger of atomic warfare.



There is little mystery about why Britain made overtures to join the alliance. It was attracted because it hoped by the alliance to come to terms with Iraqi nationalism while preserving most of the military advantages which it had enjoyed from the treaty, dating from 1930, which had bound Iraq in the familiar status of a subordinate ally. That treaty gave Britain air bases. After Britain had met the nationalist demands of Egypt, which was hostile to it, it was hard not to respond to the similar, though more friendly, pressure from Iraq that its treaty should be revised. Already in 1948 there had been negotiation for revision. A new treaty had been agreed upon – the Treaty of Portsmouth – but it was not ratified by Iraq. It was too much like the former treaty, and the opponents of the government caused riots in Baghdad until the government gave way. The Baghdad alliance seemed to show Britain a way by which it might surrender its former treaty rights, give back the bases – and receive again, as part of the processes of the alliance, the substantial military rights which it thought necessary.

Britain's overture was welcomed. The alliance was made. Of the other countries invited to join, Pakistan and Persia responded; the Persian accession took some of the other signatories by surprise. Soon Britain was speaking of the new group, the Baghdad alliance, as the cornerstone of its new Middle East policy. Lord Strang, who was the civil service head of the Foreign Office at the time, spoke of it recently as 'that majestic structure'. But, sweeping as such description may have been, those who used this language had probably little idea of the true significance of the treaty, or how weighty its consequences were to be.

The treaty was a reaffirmation of the resolve by Western countries to maintain bases in the Middle East. It increased Russia's resolve to sweep away these bases. If in order to do this it was necessary for Russia to play a much more active part in Middle East affairs, it was ready to do so. The machinery of the Baghdad alliance propelled Russia forward. And it was encouraged to do so the more because the alliance angered most of Arab opinion. Arabs saw in it one more desire by the West to try to use Arab countries as pawns in their Cold War against Russia. In their eyes such a manoeuvre was a denial of Arab equality and sovereignty. It reinforced their suspicion that the West never gave



anything without a plan of entangling the Arabs in its military plans. The West seemed determined to treat the Arab countries as satellites, not as equals. Russian denunciation of the alliance was therefore likely to be heard by the Arabs with sympathy.

There was another reason why the treaty was antipathetic to many of the Arab leaders. Little by little, the original concepts of the alliance changed. It became an aberration from the original plan of Dulles to promote a rampart against Russia. Instead it became an instrument for blocking the ambitions of Egypt to be the paramount Arab state. In the eyes of Egypt, Britain was trying to restore its ascendancy in the Middle East by exalting its client state Iraq.

Iraq was Egypt's main rival for ascendancy among the Arab peoples. Iraq has had an interesting history. It was constituted as a state in 1919, being designed as a kingdom for Prince Feisal, the ally of Britain in the first world war. At that time Iraq was mostly desert and was no match for sophisticated Egypt. The relatively simple conditions made the British ascendancy over Iraq rather less galling; in many ways the alliance was to Iraq's benefit. Little by little, the state consolidated itself. It had the advantage of possessing in Nuri es Said the shrewdest Arab statesman of the generation.

Nuri es Said, today the senior statesman of the Arab countries, has dominated Iraq since its creation; even when he has been forced out of office by votes in parliament he has governed from behind the scenes. He has the art of using others to promote the causes in which he is interested, and is sufficiently dissociated from them so that if they fail he is not ruined. He lives to fight again. He is a great manager of men. He proceeds infinitely more cautiously than Nasser, is not distracted by emotion, and sees more clearly ahead. His moderate ambition has been to build up the economic strength and stability of Iraq; if he has had the ambition to win for Iraq the primacy among the Arab states he has believed that this may best be brought about by concentrating first on Iraq's own strength.

Nuri was aided by fortune. In the post-war years, Iraq, whose wealth was not before suspected, has become one of the richest oil producers in the world. Between 1935 and 1955 its oil production increased from four million tons to twenty-four million. Its



revenue last year from oil royalties was £74 million. Nuri has invested a large proportion of these revenues in national development, entrusting their administration to a development board which is semi-autonomous. By Western standards Iraq is still a backward state, with an inefficient civil service. But it is now strong enough to be an effective challenger of Egypt. The Baghdad alliance was the challenge.

From the beginning, the alliance suffered from one great weakness. Iraq was its centre, and Iraq's adherence depended on Nuri. There was no certainty that his successors would continue it. Nuri wove his own personal policies; he was not, like Nasser, the agent of forces which would continue even if he were removed. But those who joined the alliance were willing to take the risk of its collapsing suddenly.

The challenge which the alliance meant to Nasser was not plain at first sight. The text of the treaty did not mention Egypt; it was directed against Russia. The parties to it even invited Egypt to join. For a few hours Nasser seems to have thought of agreeing; he may have hoped to win from Iraq the Arab leadership in the alliance. But he changed his mind quickly, and regarded the alliance as an unjustified intrusion by the West into the affairs of the Arab countries with the object of exalting Nuri and depressing Nasser.

If the alliance was to be a counter-weight against Nasser, it had to draw in the other Arab countries. Thus as soon as it was formed a struggle began between the signatories of the alliance and Egypt for the allegiance of Syria and Jordan. This was the period of bitter discord between the Arab countries. Its significance was not fully understood in the West. In this contest Iraq was from the start at a disadvantage since its connexion with Britain and Turkey exposed it to the charge of having taken sides with the imperialists. Some Arabs who had hoped that Iraq, as a means of furthering Arab unification, would bring about a federation with Jordan and Syria, condemned the alliance partly because it made it much more difficult for Iraq, handicapped by its partners, to take this lead among the Arab peoples.

In these manoeuvres the fate of Syria was of special interest; it has been the home of the fiercest and most unqualified Arab nationalism, even though the Syrian government has never



distinguished itself, or been stable. The Baghdad allies lost the struggle for Syria, even though Turkey went to the length of making hardly concealed military threats on the Syrian border. The counter-attraction by Egypt was too strong. Similarly, the allies failed to win over Jordan. If it had been free to choose, the Jordan government, bound by close ties to Iraq, would certainly have joined the alliance. But Jordanian politics are obsessed by Israel, to which Jordan is vulnerable, and among the Jordanian people a large proportion are refugees from Palestine. These have only one interest, the recovery of their homeland, and they believed that Egypt was more likely to help them and to protect Jordan against Israel than were the members of the Baghdad group. Egyptian propaganda, backed by funds from Saudi Arabia (which also opposed the Baghdad alliance), raised popular feeling. Cabinets changed fast while the issue was in doubt; but in the end Jordan entered the Egyptian block. The commotions which the alliance so quickly brought about seemed to justify the criticism constantly made by Jawaharlal Nehru – that the forming of military blocks, even if intended to bring stability and security, only increases the international tension.

The struggle between the Arab countries increased Nasser's self-confidence. In many of the Arab countries, the educated classes looked to him rather than to their own governments. Egypt, with its universities, supplied the schoolmasters for most of the Arab countries. These formed a kind of Egyptian fifth-column. But Nasser's success stirred up growing fear among the rival Arab governments; and even some who had at first supported him, such as King Saud of Saudi Arabia, sought ways of restraining him.

To over-ride their opposition Nasser had to proclaim himself more insistently the champion of the Arabs against Israel.

## 5

### *Israel*

AT this stage, Israel began to dominate the picture.

During the few years previously, between the end of the war with the Arabs and the first months of 1955, Israel and the Arab



states, though full of bad blood towards each other, had not seemed to be on the edge of war. They had snarled at one another, they had raided one another, and the Arabs had carried on economic warfare, blockading Israel in the Suez Canal and in the Gulf of Aqaba; they had shown themselves irreconcilable; but the armies had not moved, and neither side seriously expected them to do so. The plan of the Arabs was to be neither at peace nor at war with Israel. They refused all idea of converting the armistice which had ended the war in 1949 into a full-fledged peace; but they wished to postpone breaking the armistice until they were a great deal stronger.

Prudence on both sides helped to keep this precarious peace; another stabilizing factor was the Tripartite Declaration, which had been made in 1950 by the three powers, Britain, America, and France. It stated the intention of these powers to intervene with force in case of action by either side to violate the armistice borders; and it stated also, though rather ambiguously, the intention to ensure that neither side obtained arms in excess of what it needed for defence purposes. By and large the powers observed the second part of this declaration, and by this means a rough balance of weapons was maintained.

During this period of relative peace, Israel settled down. It absorbed many more refugees from all parts of the world, including the Jews from the Oriental countries. The Western Jews, in whose hands power had first been concentrated, began to be anxious about the future of their Western standards; but the government's feat in receiving the depressed Oriental Jews, and in quickly bringing their children up to the cultural level of the Westerners, surprised all visitors to Israel. The Israeli army became celebrated for efficiency. The parliamentary and liberal institutions worked impressively – all the more because of the contrast in other Middle Eastern countries. But the economic prospects continued to look ominous. To pay for its excess of imports, Israel depended upon American governmental aid and the contributions of Western Jewry. The capital which had poured into the country had not been invested very productively. One of the paradoxes was that the Jews, who might have been expected to shine at economic organization and to be dubious soldiers, proved in fact first-class soldiers and rather second-rate business



men. Partly this was because the Jews who had settled down in Israel and had become acclimatized took on increasingly the character of the circumambient Arabs. It is ironical that one of the difficulties in reconciling Jews and Arabs is that now they are so much alike.

In spite of the successes of the Israeli government, Israel continued to live in fear. Fear was ever present. It was not surprising. Israel is a minute country; at one point it is only ten miles wide. All round were the Arabs, breathing fire, implacable if not daring at once to be active, convinced absolutely that the existence of Israel was a crime against the Arab peoples. The million Arab refugees who had fled from or been driven from their land in Palestine kept their wrongs perpetually before the Arab eye. As more and more Jewish refugees came into Israel, Arabs wondered how they could be accommodated, and grew suspicious that Israel intended one day to burst its borders, and to extend a Jewish empire from the Nile to the Euphrates. In Arab eyes, one of the crimes of Israel was that it was a puppet state of the West, which was intended to give the West a permanent imperialist foothold in the Middle East. The Jews, for all their adjustment to their new land, remained a foreign body in the Middle East. They might have a military preponderance and such superiority in organization that the Arabs were over-awed. But the Jews, looking ahead, believed that in the long run the Arabs too must learn the art of organizing modern military states. When that day came, how could Israel, with its population of less than a million, survive against the pressure of forty million Arabs? Could Israel really rely on the guarantee of the Great Powers? In the past, great powers had often defaulted. One hope for Israel was that it should persuade the Arabs to make peace during the lull. But the Arabs refused.<sup>1</sup> Because of these circumstances the Israelis became always more militant, even though by temperament most would have been glad to live at peace with the Arabs, and though probably only a minority of the population were Zionists interested in further expansion.

1. In the early years of the lull, it is possible that if Israel had taken a more generously imaginative line about the return of refugees it might have induced at least Egypt to make a settlement. Later, Israel began to think in terms of the use of force in order to drive the Arabs to make peace.



Under the impulse of fear, Israel turned increasingly to fear as its best protector. It did so first in policing its border. This border was never quiet, partly because it had been drawn so fortuitously. In many places, houses were on one side of the border, fields on another. The former Arab owners of farms would steal across the border to pick their oranges.

There was much profitable smuggling and raiding. Some of the Arab governments connived at Arab incursions. Israel did not retaliate by similar infiltrations: instead every now and then it made spectacular and very heavy military assaults, as much damage being done in a limited space of an hour or two as the very efficient Jewish army could contrive. It found that the immediate effect of such raids was that for a time the borders became deadly quiet. But all the time the fears on both sides grew. On the Arab side of the border, capital drained away from the areas affected by raiding, especially in Jordan, and they relapsed economically to medieval conditions. Jordan was the most exposed of the Arab states, and its politics took a malignant turn because of the fear and uncertainty. At every major fray on its border there was expectation of revolution at the capital, since the opposition accused the government of failure to offer proper resistance.

Early in 1955, after a general election, Mr Ben-Gurion, one of the main founding fathers of Israel, became once again prime minister. He had held power in the fiery years of the State's creation, but later, in disillusion or out of a desire to recoup his energies, had retired to the desert to meditate and plough his farm. Mr Ben-Gurion is a heroic and prophetic figure. His family, which came from Russia, were among the first migrants to Palestine. He grew up on its soil. He is farmer and scholar; he has a natural power of command; he has a kind of prophetic eloquence; he has a gift for military strategy; his burning passion was to perpetuate, and perhaps enlarge, Israel.

Mr Ben-Gurion's return to power caused premonitory anxiety both among the Arabs and in the West. Israel tried to dispel it. But within ten days of his taking office, the Israeli army delivered the most crushing reprisal raid in its history. It took place in the Gaza strip, and was directed at the Egyptian army. This raid, which happened in February 1955, is one of the most



fateful dates in Middle East history. For up to that moment Egypt had been rather less active against Israel than the other Arab countries; there had been fewer incidents between Israel and Egypt than between Israel and Syria or Jordan. The Egyptian frontier with Israel was only lightly garrisoned. The Jews took the frontier guards by surprise, and not only defeated the Egyptian frontier force but humiliated it.

To justify itself, Israel said that it had offered peace, and had been refused; the Arabs insisted on maintaining the state of war, even though an armistice had been made, and under the shield of the armistice had continued warlike acts; there was a limit to the extent to which they could do this with impunity. This may have been a logical argument, but the effects of Israel's retaliation were perhaps more than Israel foresaw. A military dictatorship cannot suffer military humiliation without risk to its position at home. Nasser was therefore stung, and his attention was thereafter fixed upon Israel. He needed security against future raids, and he wanted revenge. The tension rose.

All through 1955 the border fights grew worse. The Western countries saw the consequent danger of explosion throughout the Middle East, but during that vital year did nothing effective to prevent it. Britain did not take action because it was following divided aims; it was committed by the Tripartite Declaration to preventing the invasion of Israel; but it wanted greatly the friendship of the Arabs, and that could not be gained by any country which stood in the way of Arab attacks on Israel. If the Western countries were engaged in competition with Russia for the friendship of the Arabs, they were bound to cold-shoulder Israel. An irrational psychological state developed among many people in Britain. They took it for granted that, but for the existence of Israel and the obligation for its security which Britain unwillingly shouldered, there would have been no impediment to harmony between Britain and the Arabs; they forgot the natural animosity of the Arabs towards any Western country which insisted on unequal treaties with the Arabs.<sup>1</sup> Britain hoped that Israel might

1. Britain's task would certainly have been easier if there had been no Israel. On the other hand, Russia's influence in the Middle East was much helped by Israel's existence. Russia gained by inflaming the quarrel. Thus it did not desire the extinction of Israel.



make territorial cessions to the Arabs; it failed to realize that this would merely stimulate the Arabs to raise their sights and move on to the total obliteration of Israel. For different reasons, America also was unwilling to take any stabilizing action, such as giving more positive guarantees of Israel's security. America still believed it possible to remain uncommitted in the Middle East. It wanted a free hand when a crisis should arise. Most Americans believed honestly that they would thus be in the best position to maintain peace. They mistrusted British policy, whatever it might be, and did not wish to be associated with it. There was emotional sympathy for both sides – for the Arabs as a people struggling to be free, and for Israel because of the strong Zionist sections in America. There was the hope that time might solve the worst problems.

Colonel Nasser was set upon a more drastic solution than intensified raiding. His senior officers demanded a superiority of arms over Israel, and Nasser, remembering that Farouk had fallen because he had not given the army the modern weapons which it wanted, was determined to get them. He sought them from the Western countries, but though Britain was willing to give Centurion tanks these were not enough. He gave formal notice to the West that he would seek to make purchases elsewhere. Thus the way was opened for the arms deal with Russia.

This event, which happened in August 1955, was to upset the existing balance throughout the Middle East, to increase both fears and ambitions, to exacerbate British feeling, and to bring Russia, with all its guile, resources, and patience, into the centre of Middle East affairs. It carried all the actors a long way towards the eventual catastrophe.

## 6

*Arms Deal*

THE story of the arms deal is still not fully known. One account is that it came about in a very casual way; and that is quite possible. According to this version, Mr Shepilov, the editor of *Pravda* – and later to be foreign minister – came to Cairo for the celebration in July 1955 of the third anniversary of the overthrow of



King Farouk. At a cocktail party, an assistant of Colonel Nasser lamented to him that the West would not provide arms. Why not, said Shepilov, try Russia? Negotiations began next day. It was to result in an alarmingly short time in a formidable delivery of weapons, from Czechoslovakia as well as from Russia, and in arrangements for training in Poland the officers and technicians of the Egyptian army. Just how large was the delivery is still not known. The Israelis believed at the time that it comprised 100 MIG fighters, 50 Ilyushin bombers, 300 tanks, and some small warships. But, when a year later Israel captured Sinai and large stores of armaments, it decided that these estimates had been too low, or that the programme had been enlarged after the original agreement. At the same time, smaller but important deliveries had been made to Syria.

The wonder is not that Russia supplied the arms, but that it had not offered them earlier, and the Arabs had not asked for them earlier. Russia was probably sincerely alarmed when the Baghdad alliance was made; though it was a defensive alliance, the Russian government resents all combinations on its borders. In a sense, the arms deal was the reply to the alliance. It was quickly apparent that, by the arms delivery, Russia, at little cost to itself and with almost no danger, changed radically the situation throughout the Middle East. The balance of power was changed; as soon as the Egyptian army had been able to absorb the very large quantity of arms sent in, it would have superiority. Weapons on the scale provided were enough to supply not only the Arabs, but also a Russian 'volunteer' force if at some stage one might be despatched. The section of the Tripartite Declaration which provided for keeping an arms balance became automatically out of date. Israel bristled. Fear and tension and instability increased. The prestige of the Western powers, under whose eyes the Russian arms were sent in, fell.

One of the reasons why the Arabs had been afraid previously to have close relations with Russia was that the Arab rulers had been as disturbed about Communism as the governments of the West. A change was brought about by Shepilov and by the work beforehand of Daniel Solod who had been Russian Ambassador in Cairo before his visit. They argued that the Arabs could safely regard Russia, not as a proselytizing Communist



state, but as one great power playing power politics with other great powers. They tried to prove that in international affairs there were common interests between Russia and the Arab states; the Arabs could co-operate in promoting these interests without being in danger of undergoing Communist revolution. They preached their doctrine at a favourable moment: feeling was so high that many Arabs would have called in Russia if Russia offered them help against Israel, even if it was at the full price of going Communist: many others took the easy course of persuading themselves that Russia really was a harmless ally. Russia was a long way off, had had nothing yet to do with Arabs, and had committed no atrocities against them; the Arabs were more than half inclined to believe that the adverse accounts of Communist oppression were Western propaganda. Even the more cautious and sceptical, like Nasser himself, felt that they could probably use Russia for Arab purposes, and that they could look after themselves and save themselves from Russian snares.

Thus the arms deal was made. The instinct of the Western powers had been right when they decided that the best way of keeping tension low in the Middle East was to keep the region as starved of weapons as was possible. But after the summer of 1955 this course was no longer possible. Should the West try to offset the arms deliveries to Egypt by supplying arms to Israel? That, it was said, would cause an arms race. So, although in the end the Israelis obtained some countervailing weapons from France, the arms balance was allowed to become unbalanced. The growing pile of tanks, aeroplanes, and ammunition caused new fears, new rashness, new aggressiveness by the Arabs, and a new conviction in Israel that, if Israel waited until the Arabs were fully armed, doom would inevitably come upon it.

From bases in the Sinai peninsula, Egypt began to organize systematic raids by commandos, or 'fedayeen', into Israel. The commandos were recruited from refugees from Palestine, who knew the country minutely. Their instructions were to shoot at cars in the roads and to murder more or less indiscriminately. As Israel is a very small country, the fedayeen could penetrate deep within it, often escaping over the border on the other side into Jordan. The aim was to cause fear and insecurity throughout the country. This was peculiarly rash, for a highly organized society



like that of Israel was bound to think in terms of putting an end to the terror by a large-scale military operation. An intervention by the Secretary General of the United Nations, and his visit to the area in the spring of 1956, did not bring any lasting relief. Promises of better behaviour soon wore thin.

Emboldened by its growing military strength, Egypt increased its pressure, not only on the Jews but on Britain. Eden's renewed attempt to conciliate the Arabs – made in the Mansion House speech in November 1955, by proposing sweeping cessions of Israeli territory – was brushed aside. Egypt redoubled its efforts to end the British ascendancy in Jordan and replace it by its own. A war of nerves and propaganda took place which nearly tore Jordan apart; Nasser succeeded in winning the allegiance of part of the Jordan population, which rioted or demonstrated as his agents directed. They succeeded in bringing about the expulsion from Jordan of the British commander of the Arab Legion, General Glubb. The plot for this came to a head at the very moment when the British Foreign Secretary was visiting Cairo; and though it was discovered afterwards that this coincidence was fortuitous, at the time it seemed deliberate, and this increased the resentment of the British government.

The stage was now very nearly set for the final calamity. Eden was engaged in his duel with Nasser, and determined to stop the extension of his power. Russia was seeking new means of intervening in the Middle East. Israel thought more and more that in preventive war lay its only salvation. America vacillated.

## 7

*Involvement of France*

ONE more converging set of circumstances, and the background is complete. France came to believe as deeply as Israel that its safety required the fall of Nasser.

France, which once shared with Britain the chief Western influence in the Middle East, had been expelled from Syria and Lebanon during the second world war. But it had kept its connexion with Arab affairs because of its continuing hold upon the west-



ward extension of the Arab lands, in what is called the Maghrib. Numerically, the majority of the population of these countries speak Hamitic languages, and are not true Arabs. But they are all Moslems, and in resisting France they followed the lead of the Arab section. Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco were more closely bound to France than Iraq or Jordan to Britain. Algeria has been juridically a part of metropolitan France ever since 1848: and if Tunis and Morocco had retained their own kings, the monarchs were, until recently, either subservient or, if they proved too independent, ran the danger of deportation. Tunisia had been declared a protectorate in 1881 and Morocco in 1912.

France had brought great benefit to the Arab countries. It had poured in capital. New towns, ports, industries, mines were developed rapidly. But these gifts were imperfectly appreciated; and they were offset, in Arab eyes, by the malaise which French supervision had brought about. '*Le don des techniques a prévalu sur celui des âmes*', said General Catroux. Economic development increased the gap between rich and poor and drove masses of people out of business; for this the French were blamed. In these countries of the Maghrib there was the added irritant of French settlers whose arrival had been assisted financially by the French government – one million in Algeria, nearly half a million in Morocco, 200,000 in Tunisia. The Arabs believed that the French had filched the best land; and French functionaries got the jobs in the Civil Service. In Tunisia even the postmen were French. True, in Algeria the fiction was maintained that Algerians were French citizens, equal to the Metropolitan French; but in practice all the Moslems except a small minority were second or third class citizens.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the second world war, the Arab revolt in North Africa began in earnest. The Atlantic Charter, the French withdrawal from Lebanon, the spectacle of France's decline, the

1. One of the greatest of the French colonial administrators, Marshal Lyautey, had been impressed by the dangerous effects of breaking up the old Islamic civilization. In Morocco he had tried to segregate the inhabitants who were content with the old life from the new influences; the new French townships were set a little apart from their Moroccan counterparts. But that was interpreted as a resolution to keep Moslems socially and culturally at arm's length.



intrusion of Americans and American ideas of anti-colonialism, all helped it forward. At first it moved from its own inner force, but increasingly the attention of the Arabs of North Africa turned towards the Arabs of the Middle East, who seemed to them to be progressing faster. To catch up with them, it was necessary to end colonialism. In 1947 the Arab League established an office for the Maghrib. The Arab leaders of North Africa went increasingly to Cairo, and were influenced by its ideas about tactics and guerrilla action.

The French did not try to resist blindly. They knew the need for concessions, if only to forestall larger ones, but their actions were vacillating and slow. One reason for this was the special constitutional and emotional attachment to Algeria, a French possession for over a century, an important source of recruits for the French army, and economically supplementary to the French economy. Rumours of the discovery of immense oil reserves were to make it the more precious. The idea of withdrawing from Algeria did not enter the French mind, and any action contemplated for the protectorates had to be considered in the light of its effect on an Algeria decreed to be for ever French. A second obstacle to a consistent and timely policy was the fact that nearly every post-war French government was a coalition and that the Radicals were an all but essential element of the coalition and had the interests of the settlers very close to their heart.

The settlers were themselves the third and greatest obstacle. They had contributed significantly to the development of the territories and they held that their importance to the economy entitled them to special political privileges, and to representation as a community in elected bodies. This the nationalists would not have; while admitting the economic services of the settlers and promising to safeguard them, they refused to accord them a privileged political frontier. Nor did the political behaviour of the settlers suggest that they were particularly well qualified for political responsibility.

The story of the French negotiations and the Arab assault need not be told in detail. On the Arab side, two leaders of distinction arose, Dr Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, and Sultan Muhammed V of Morocco. The Sultan had recognized that the best way of assur-



ing his own future was to try to place himself at the head of nationalism. On the French side a leader with courage and clear purpose was M. Mendès-France. French policies oscillated, and in all three territories there was armed revolt, widespread terror, reprisals, and partial breakdown of government. France was forced from position to position, and retired reluctantly. But, thanks to the genius of Mendès-France, it was able to obtain in Tunisia an agreement with the nationalists which left it with almost more than it might have dared hope for. Mendès-France's policy was to revert to the strict letter of the treaty of 1881 by which the protectorate in Tunisia had been established. In the succeeding years, France had gone far beyond what it was given in this treaty. Mendès-France surrendered these encroachments. By an agreement in the summer of 1954, after the fall of Mendès-France, the government of Tunisia in all domestic matters was restored to Tunisian hands, subject to provisions for the protection of French lives; but France retained control of defence and foreign relations.

Mendès-France tried to bring about a settlement of the same kind in Morocco, but he was forced out of office before he could succeed. Nevertheless, after France had tried to counter the nationalist movement by appealing to reactionary local chiefs, and had deported the Sultan, it realized the bankruptcy of its policy. It restored the Sultan, and slowly tried to find a basis of co-operation with him.

It was in Algeria that the struggle was the bitterest, and that France was least compromising. During 1955 and 1956 it grew into large-scale civil war. Behind the Algerian resistance, France saw increasingly the hand of Egypt. The Algerian leaders consulted Egypt. Algerian rebels went to Cairo for training. The Egyptian radio sustained the spirit of rebellion. Egypt sent in arms; during the autumn of 1956 France intercepted an Egyptian ship full of modern weapons. The temper of the French government grew uglier because it had received promises from Colonel Nasser that he would cease to foment the Algerian revolt, and it seemed that his word meant little.

By the middle of 1956 the prospects in Algeria were very threatening. France feared that it might face a war, expensive and hopeless, such as it had lost in Indo-China; and the prospect was the bleaker because the French government, owing to the



pressure of the million French settlers in Algeria, saw no chance of a settlement such as it had reached in Tunisia and Morocco. But apparently the French government convinced itself that, if there were no Egyptian instigation, the Algerian resistance might still collapse. An increasing number of people in Paris asked whether the best way of dealing with Algeria might not be to deal with Nasser. Might not France solve its problem best if it struck at Cairo? The cry was '*Il faut en finir*'.

## 8

*Aswan Dam*

ALL was now ready for the explosion; and the precipitating cause was not long delayed. It was the dispute over the Aswan Dam.

The growth of this quarrel is a curious history, some of it still obscure. The Aswan High Dam, one of several projects which from time to time had been put forward as a remedy for Egypt's pressing economic problems, was intended to provide for the needs of the rapidly growing population of the narrow Nile valley, in which there was no new land to be taken into cultivation. By generating electricity, the dam would make possible an industrialization by means of which at least some of the surplus population could get a living.

Nasser says that in the first instance the project was suggested to him by Western engineers; he had not heard of it before. On examining it, he became convinced that here was a partial solution of Egypt's problems, and here also was a plan, ambitious, spectacular, beneficent, which might fortify his government's prestige. Nasser had been naturally concerned because, although in the Arab lands outside Egypt he was admired as the symbol of the Arab aspiration towards unity, he had not known the knack of winning the affection of Egyptians. General Neguib had been much more popular. But if Nasser could build the dam, something as vast as the pyramids and much more useful, he would at last be accepted as the father and benefactor of his country.

The dam would be costly. The minimum estimate was \$1300



million. It would take fifteen to twenty years to build. But, from the start, Egypt was given to understand that foreign aid might be provided. Nor was this unreasonable. Egypt, whose economic needs were so great, had up till then received much less than its fair share of foreign aid. The interest of the World Bank was sought and won. Elaborate technical surveys were made, and gradually a scheme evolved under which the World Bank undertook to lend \$200 million provided that America and Britain between them lent \$70 million, while Egypt undertook to provide \$900 million in the form of services and materials. There was a reservation in the World Bank offer; Egypt must obtain agreement with the other riparian states of the Nile – the Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup>

Egypt was dilatory in negotiating with these countries, and made little progress. The whole project was apparently left to slumber. Then there was sudden drama. Mr Shepilov, soon to be Russian Foreign Minister, visited Cairo, and in general terms discussed plans for economic development. The rumour spread – true or false – that he had offered finance for the dam; and Egypt encouraged the rumour, perhaps to put the West on its mettle. The Egyptians understood that Russia probably hoped to entangle Egypt in an alliance. But they were confident that they could avoid the snares; moreover they were attracted by the idea that loans by Russia might be repaid in cotton, of which the West had been buying less and less.

Thus the dam acquired a new significance. Previously it had stood for the modernization of Egypt and relief of its poverty. Now it became also an indicator of Russo-American rivalry.

What followed has to be pieced together, and in part conjectured. Mr Eugene Black, the President of the World Bank, came to Cairo. The threat of the Russian offer certainly at one stage made the Western countries more obliging. Nasser allowed it to become known that an agreement was as good as achieved – per-

1. Economic aid of this kind was for Egypt a second best when compared with the supply of arms. It was arms which Egypt wanted more than all else. A Russian arms deal was bound to be more popular than a Western deal on the Aswan Dam. Moreover, Egypt feared that Western aid would make it more vulnerable to pressure, since the West might threaten its interruption in case of political disputes.



haps with both Russia and the West subscribing. Next the rumour went round that Russia, on being asked to be more specific about its offer, was backing down. Egypt turned back to the West. But now opinion in America had again changed. America had taken very badly the Egyptian arms deal with Russia and Czechoslovakia, and this for financial as well as political reasons. When the size of the deal became known, and when it was clear that the arms were not a gift but had to be paid for, the American financial advisers, and the advisers of the World Bank, asked whether Egypt had not mortgaged in the arms purchase the funds which it had promised to devote to the dam. Did Nasser hope to trick the Bank by getting a loan on condition of matching it with his own funds, and then, when the operation had once started, would he admit that his funds had vanished and ask the World Bank to finance the whole? The doubt and anxiety were genuine. Egypt's financial prospects in 1956 looked much more doubtful than in 1955. There were uncertainties about the technical virtues of the project, and it was suggested that some rival schemes which had been set aside might be both less expensive and more beneficent.

There was a second reason which may have made the American government anxious to extricate itself from the negotiations. In June, Nasser had recognized the government of Communist China, and his lead was followed, as he knew it would be, by other Arab states. The repugnance to Communist China is a political neurosis in America. Nasser's act opened up the project that the Afro-Asian block in the United Nations assembly might, with the Communist block and other allies, make an effective demonstration for China's admission to the United Nations. For other reasons Nasser had become suspect. There seemed to be no end to his trouble-making in Jordan, Algeria, Kenya, and elsewhere. The American government may have been disquieted that he was able to use for his propaganda the funds given him by Saudi Arabia, which came from oil royalties paid by America. During the summer of 1956 the State Department had been questioning the reliance on Egypt, and debating whether America should not instead join the Baghdad alliance. An ominous sign for Egypt was the replacement of an American ambassador who favoured Nasser by one who was less committed. In short, there



was a disposition in Washington to cut Nasser down to more manageable size; and Zionist influence may have encouraged it further. How far Britain was consulted about America's doubts, and whether it may have taken steps to enlarge them, is still one of the mysteries of these transactions.

In the middle of July the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, who had been consulting with his government in Cairo, returned to the United States with the instruction to apply formally for American help in building the dam. This was made public. Moreover the ambassador announced on his arrival that Egypt had decided not to accept a rival Russian offer, assuming that one really existed. But, on the very day that he returned, the Appropriations Committee of the United States Senate approved a resolution asking the Administration not to give any money to Egypt without consulting Congress. Dulles, far from expressing resentment at this interference by Congress as was his wont, and far from fighting for a free hand, agreed without demur; he seemed pleased.

Two days later the State Department issued a statement saying that the American offer was withdrawn. Britain followed suit. The World Bank's offer, which had been conditional on Anglo-American support, lapsed automatically.

By its timing and its manner, as much as by its content, this was a stinging public rebuff to Nasser. If he had dangerous enemies at home, this would have been their signal for action, so imperilled was his prestige. For a foreign minister to handle a dictator in this way must mean either that he is contemptuous of him, or else that the foreign minister is stupid. This act was not the only erratic one by Dulles during his handling of Middle East affairs which, through maladroitness, increased tension. Anybody, except Dulles, must have seen that some major thing would follow – either a rapid deflation of Nasser and a change of balance in the Middle East, or a convulsive response. For a few days the world speculated whether Nasser would turn round and close with a Russian offer over the dam. But the Russians too began to back-pedal.

Then, in a speech in Alexandria on 26 July, Nasser announced that he was nationalizing the Suez Canal: its revenues would pay for the dam.



### *Part Three*

## THE CRISIS, JULY-DECEMBER 1956

### 1

#### *Nationalization to cease-fire*

WITH the nationalization of the canal the accumulating crisis broke. The elements had assembled at the flashpoint. A few men struggled to direct the lightning but each one of them was more or less blinded. The story of the next few months is a piece of detailed diplomatic history in which many of the details are still missing. We must follow the course of events as closely as we can, but before doing so it is well to remind ourselves that we shall be examining not an inhuman chain of cause and effect but a flesh and blood story with human actors. Four characters stand out: Nasser and Eden, Dulles and – a personality who had not previously played a major part – Nehru.

Nasser's character we have already sketched. He is the type of self-assertive young nationalist who yet differed from the type by having the ability to play a coolly calculating hand; it was never quite clear whether his impetuous outbursts were spontaneous or considered. He had the Leader's dangerous sense of mission and his mission included the extinction of Israel by any means. For him, as for every dictator, a crisis was peculiarly dangerous because of the opportunities afforded to enemies at home. For him alone among the principal actors, existence, not merely political existence, was at stake.

Nehru, the principal spokesman of the new nations and of coloured suspicions of the white races, was himself still obsessed by fears of white colonialism which the Anglo-French grab at the canal was to confirm. Despite some pique at not having been forewarned by Nasser of the nationalization coup, he had a special reason for remaining on good terms with Egypt in order to prevent the formation of a Moslem block which would include Pakistan but not India. He had for years been fascinated by the art of preventing explosions between the Great Powers; and, with his growing understanding of economic problems, he was aware



of the importance to India of the canal. (Curiously, his name derives from the Urdu word for canal.)

Dulles had great qualities negated by great handicaps. He was industrious, widely informed and well intentioned, but his manner was irritatingly didactic and he lacked political support. He had a great capacity for blowing hot and cold, for initiating a policy and then dropping it; the Northern Tier and the Aswan Dam were cases in point and he was unable to make up his mind whether there was more good or evil in Nasser. Like Sir John Simon in this country and Dean Acheson in the United States, Dulles had not the constant party political backing which, as Churchill has repeatedly emphasized, is essential for a statesman in a democracy. Churchill may have been thinking chiefly of moral support but political backing is also needed for more mundane reasons. Without it a politician has constantly to be angling for the support of this group or that and so his policy chops and changes. (Acheson avoided the dangers because he had strong principles and a strong President.) Dulles had, besides, a certain love of ambiguity, which is not infrequently found in men of high morality but can lead to conduct which in men of less probity would unhesitatingly be reprehended while in men of higher standing it merely baffles. He was also a sick man.

Finally Eden, a man so crowned with the laurels of peace that he was at this very time a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize; a champion of the League of Nations; a statesman of almost unrivalled diplomatic experience. Few men in British public life have had in the public eye a character so different from that seen by his associates. The urbane, pin-stripe figure of popular imagination was also a man of strong and not always admirable emotions. He had obstinacy and yet, as Stalin discovered, he was easy to shift for those who had discovered his weak spots; from experience he had learnt diplomatic flexibility but by nature he was prone to fixed ideas, and one of these ideas was that Nasser resembled Hitler; as Carthage to Cato, so Nasser to Eden. He was becoming impervious to unwelcome facts and advice, and nobody who saw him on television will forget the unconcealed personal animus with which he spoke of Nasser and which prompted the frightening query whether judgement in high places had not gone astray. Only later did it become clear how sick he too was.



These were the men, if any, who must control the situation which was precipitated when Nasser abruptly decided to play the canal against the Aswan Dam. In the next fourteen weeks the crisis passed through four stages. First came the London conference of canal users, the mission to Cairo of a delegation from the conference, led by Menzies, and Nasser's rejection of the London plan. Next came Dulles' plan for a Canal Users' Association to negotiate with Egypt. In the third phase the scene shifted to New York and the Security Council, where private discussions raised hopes of a settlement. The fourth phase was into battle – and out again.

Nasser's nationalization raised legal, political, and economic issues. Legally, it prematurely put an end to the existing concession to operate the canal. This concession had been originally granted to de Lesseps by the Khedive of Egypt; it was now vested in the Universal Maritime Suez Canal Company; and it had another twelve years to run. The Canal Company was an Egyptian company with headquarters in Egypt and France. Its shareholders were largely foreigners but in this it differs only in degree from other large concerns such as Unilever or I.C.I. which also have numerous foreign shareholders but which (it is generally held) the British government has the right to nationalize provided it can get Parliament to agree. The main difference between the Canal Company and other such concerns was not its constitution but the nature of its operation. It was not an industrial or commercial concern but an international public utility entrusted with the upkeep and management of a waterway which belonged to Egypt but was used by very many of the nations of the world.

The sovereign rights of Egypt over the waterway were not limited by the concession agreement but they were limited by the later Convention of Constantinople of 1888 (see Appendix C) under which Egypt is bound to keep the canal free and open and not to use it for blockade. By nationalizing the Canal Company's assets and liabilities Nasser, like Musaddiq in Persia in 1951, broke a contract, but according to some legal experts this was a lawful exercise of sovereign rights. Whatever the legal position, the coup was a blow to the pride of major powers and also a blow to the interests of all users if Egypt should, by incompetence or malice, impede free navigation. As soon as this hap-



pened (but not before) Egypt would be in clear breach of the Convention of Constantinople.

At the start Nasser prejudiced his case by saying that he had nationalized the canal in order to pay for the dam and so raised doubts whether he intended to pay compensation to the Canal Company (as the law requires), but after this initial petulance he played a very temperate hand. After the act of seizure he became increasingly and frustratingly difficult to attack.

First in the chain of events come statements in the House of Commons. On 27 July, the day after Nasser's speech, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition both denounced his action in the House of Commons. Gaitskell, even more vigorous in his denunciation than Eden, suggested a reference to the Security Council. In Paris the Foreign Minister used very strong language to the Egyptian Ambassador, and the French government stated that it would never accept nationalization. Nasser, in a second speech, repeated his pledge to keep the canal free and open and said that he would meet force with force. On the 30th Eden told the House of Commons that the canal could not be allowed to come under the control of a single state. This was a significant remark for there was nothing in law to prevent unfettered Egyptian control after 1968 and the Prime Minister seemed to be using Egypt's abrogation of the concession before 1968 as a ground for claiming after 1968 something that nobody had ever claimed before. More simply perhaps he was advancing a pretext for the armed action which the British and French governments were trying to set on foot and which they were at this point only prevented from launching by the discovery that their forces were not in a position to strike.

Meanwhile Anglo-French military moves and intentions had alarmed the Americans, and late on the 31st Dulles hurriedly left Washington for London to join tripartite talks which had begun two days earlier. On 2 August it was announced that the British and French governments were convening a conference to establish international control of the canal. At the same time a Royal Proclamation authorized the recall of certain reservists, and the French fleet began to assemble at Toulon. In the House of Commons the Opposition supported the Government's military measures with the proviso that force should not be used except



with the approval of the United Nations, while in the House of Lords Attlee endorsed the objective of free navigation but urged on the Government the necessity for carrying world opinion with it. Dulles, back in Washington, said in a broadcast that the canal must not be exploited for the selfish purposes of one country.

The invitations sent out from London and Paris to the conference were not universally well received when it was discovered that the conference was invited to approve international control rather than discuss it. The British and French were accused of wanting to stifle discussion and get an international rubber stamp put on their own predetermined policy, but after explanations and modifications all those invited accepted except Egypt itself and Greece (which had two reasons for refusing, in the current dispute over Cyprus and the large Greek population in Egypt). Accordingly twenty-two countries were represented when the conference opened in London on 16 August. Meanwhile ships were passing through the canal at a normal rate, and rather more than half the dues were being paid to the old Canal Company in London or Paris with the tacit, if temporary, consent of the Egyptian government.

The London conference lasted a week. Eighteen of the twenty-two members supported (subject to some amendment) proposals for an international operating Board put forward by Dulles. Against these India, which held that Egypt was entitled to nationalize the canal and that international control was an infringement of sovereignty, proposed reaffirmation and revision of the Convention of 1888, operation by Egypt subject to an annual report to the United Nations, and some form of association of the users with the Egyptian operating company. Only the U.S.S.R., Ceylon, and Indonesia supported the Indian plan.

The majority of eighteen deputed five of their number, led by Menzies, to go to Cairo and present their plan to Nasser. Talks (which were accompanied by arrests of British nationals in Cairo) lasted from 3 to 9 September and were fruitless. Nasser repeated his arguments that he was entitled to nationalize the canal, had kept the canal working normally, and was ready to attend a conference to conclude a new agreement on the basis of Egyptian ownership. He charged Britain and France with working up a



grave situation by threatening force and inciting canal pilots to leave their work. He declared that his policy was free and indiscriminating passage, development of the canal to meet the needs of increasing traffic, reasonable tolls and dues, and efficient operation.

Upon the collapse of the Menzies-Nasser talks Egypt immediately proposed to all users (except Israel) a conference to create a 'negotiating body' to discuss free passage, development, and tolls, but the British and French declared that Nasser was unwilling to negotiate (i.e. unwilling to negotiate on the basis of the Menzies proposals), and the Canal Company authorized its non-Egyptian pilots to leave their work at the end of that week. To the House of Commons, recalled from the summer recess, Eden announced an American-Anglo-French plan for a Suez Canal Users Association (Scua). He refused at first to promise to submit the dispute with Egypt to the United Nations before resorting to force, and reserved the right to take 'other measures' if Egypt tried to prevent Scua from functioning. But on the second day of the debate he promised to go to the Security Council 'if circumstances allowed or, in other words, except in an emergency'.

It was never clear what Scua was meant to do.<sup>1</sup> It was to engage pilots (who were encouraged to leave Egypt at this point) and collect dues, but on the important issue of its part in the quarrel with Egypt its founder members were divided. The British and French saw it as a means of bringing pressure to bear on Egypt – either by running a provocative convoy through the canal and daring Nasser to obstruct it and so finally put himself on the wrong side of the 1888 Convention, or by securing control of operations, services, and dues and so ousting Nasser's company and forcing him economically to his knees. But Dulles, Scua's prime begetter, had other ideas. To the notion of running a sharp-shooting Trojan Horse, he retorted that the United States would not shoot a way through the canal and hoped nobody else would. Further, he opposed economic as well as military warfare, and although he had said at first that Scua should collect dues and hand over a proportion to Egypt, he later explained that he would only insist on American ships using Scua after it had become a going concern and had come to a working arrangement with the Egyptian

1. A French diplomat in London called it a skewer without a point.



operating company. Yet without something like a monopoly Scua could not exert any pressure. So by this point Dulles had come to regard it purely as a negotiating body. This made sense but was extremely frustrating for the British and French who were expecting American aid in coercing Nasser. Dulles was trying to ride a number of different horses at once. He was trying to prevent a resort to force and also a split between east and west, and in the course of evading these dangers he failed to make his attitude clear to his Western allies and appears also to have changed his own mind in the course of the month.

At a second London conference fifteen of the eighteen adopted the Scua proposals and projected a further meeting for its formal inauguration, but before this further meeting the British and French governments asked on 23 September for a meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation created by Egypt in bringing about an end to the system of international control 'which was confirmed and completed by the Suez Canal Convention of 1888'. Dulles, apparently taken by surprise by the reference to the Security Council, approved the move in principle but regretted that it had been made before Scua had been properly organized. It seemed to prejudice his plan of first bringing Scua into existence and then using it for discussions with Egypt.

Just at this time Dulles made a most ill-considered remark at a press conference on 2 October, which in the eyes of Nasser and the rest of the world threw grave doubt on the unity of the tripartite entente. He admitted the existence of some differences between the United States and its allies and said that some of these differences touched fundamental things. He went on to explain that although the three Powers were completely united over matters like Nato, the United States necessarily took a somewhat independent stand on other matters which had a colonialist flavour, and could identify itself fully neither with the nations struggling to be free nor with the nations still bearing a measure of colonial responsibility. Moreover, at the same press conference Dulles made it clear that he opposed not merely military sanctions but also economic warfare such as the dumping of American cotton on world markets in order to ruin Egypt. Lloyd on the other hand, arriving in New York for the Security Council's meeting, showed that Britain was still prepared to use force if only as a



last resort, and Eden was to say the same a few days later to the Conservative Party conference.

A further difference between the Americans and the British and French arose over the tactics to be pursued in New York. Dulles and Hammarskjöld had, separately or jointly, conceived the idea of holding the Security Council's meetings in private. This was an unusual but not unprecedented step. Egypt was to attend the meeting (the normal procedure) and Dulles and Hammarskjöld wanted to use the occasion to begin genuine diplomatic negotiations instead of the usual playing to the world gallery. The British and French did not like this idea. They wanted to state their case as publicly as possible in the belief that its righteousness would have worldwide effect, but eventually they fell in with the plan for a closed session (preceded by public statements) after Dulles had promised that he would let Lloyd propose it and would at the end vote for the Anglo-French resolution.

The debate began on 5 October. The Anglo-French resolution asked the Security Council to condemn the nationalization of the canal as a violation of Egypt's international obligations and to tell Egypt to negotiate on the basis of the London proposals for international control and meanwhile to co-operate with Scua. The Egyptian retort was the usual one that it was neither obliged nor willing to accept international control and that the canal was still free and open and working normally even three weeks after the withdrawal of the pilots. Egypt brought forward once more its proposal for the creation of a negotiating body and produced a set of principles as a basis for this body's work (reaffirmation of the 1888 Convention, free and indiscriminating passage, equitable tolls, etc.). After these initial flourishes the Council went into secret session. On 13 October it came into the open again. The Anglo-French resolution was then put in a revised form. It now had a first part (see Appendix E) consisting of a set of principles similar to the Egyptian principles. The Egyptian Foreign Minister, Dr Fawzi, spoke in favour of this part which was put to the Council separately and unanimously approved, but when it came to the second part of the resolution (endorsing international control, the London plan, and Scua) the U.S.S.R. and Yugoslavia voted against. Since the Russian vote operated as a veto the resolution was lost.



The defeat of the Anglo-French resolution was not the only result of the Security Council's proceedings. The private meetings, where Egypt had for the first time discussed things with Britain, France, and other users, and the wide agreement on basic principles raised hopes of a negotiated settlement. It was expected that the discussions would be resumed in Geneva or some such place before the end of the month with Hammarskjöld as chairman.

Another consequence of the Security Council's meeting was a widening of the breach between the Americans and the British and French. At the outset Dulles, in an attempt to rectify the damage done by his remarks about colonialism, had seemed to draw closer to his Western allies and had taken the opportunity of an address at Williams College to stress his sympathy with their difficulties and grievances. During the week in which the Security Council was meeting reports got abroad that Britain (but not France) was weakening on international control, but, when Dulles and Lloyd had a private meeting before Lloyd's return to London, Dulles discovered that this was not so, while Lloyd too found cause for disillusionment in the no longer concealable Anglo-American divergence on the uses of Scua.

Thus far, most of the narrative is plain; some facts remain unknown, but the essentials lie on the surface. From this point on, the character of events changed. Mystery began and the searcher after truth has to dig for the facts. The crucial event was the visit of Eden and Lloyd to Paris on 16 October. What happened then has never been officially disclosed. The two British ministers held private consultations with Mollet and Pineau unattended by any fifth person. Their conference was subsequently prolific of as much speculation as the famous tête-à-tête between Napoleon and the Tsar on the raft at Tilsit. Back in London Eden made certain changes in his Cabinet. Chief among them was the move of Sir Walter Monckton from the Ministry of Defence to the relatively obscure post of Paymaster-General (with a seat in the Cabinet). Monckton was known to be critical of Eden's policy, and the timing of the change recalled the removal of Noel-Baker from Commonwealth Relations to Fuel and Power on the eve of the Labour Party's banishment of Seretse Khama – a policy Noel-Baker was thought not to approve.

In the Middle East new troubles had been occurring. Through-



out October tension between Jordan and Israel was unusually high. On 11 October Israel made a heavy reprisal raid into Jordan which evoked a strong British protest. There was talk of Iraqi troops entering Jordan; Israel, recalling that Iraq was the one Arab state which had refused even to sign an armistice agreement with Israel, declared that this would be an act of war. The entry of Iraqi troops was called off, though Jordan announced that they would enter the instant Israel attacked. On the same day Ben-Gurion said in the Knesset that Israel would never start a preventive war or any other kind of war.

A few days later elections in Jordan resulted, as expected, in victory for pro-Egyptian and anti-British and anti-Iraqi parties, and a joint army command was established by Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The Jordan chief of staff announced: 'The time has come for the Arabs to choose the appropriate time to launch the assault for Israel's destruction'. The bell was tolling for Israel, which began at once to mobilize. The life and appearance of the country were transformed; all Israelis were waiting for their attack on Jordan to begin, and diplomats reported that Israel was going to war. Eisenhower addressed two urgent warnings to Ben-Gurion (unbacked, however, by the other two signatories of the Tripartite Declaration).

On 29 October Israel invaded Egypt. The next moves need to be followed day by day and sometimes hour by hour.

The United States immediately called for an emergency meeting of the Security Council. The Council met at 9.30 a.m. (EST) on the 30th, a few hours after the attack, to consider an American resolution requiring the Israelis to go back to their borders and everybody else to refrain from using force.

In London a few hours earlier (9.30 a.m. GMT) the American Ambassador had called on the Foreign Secretary at the latter's request, to discuss the American resolution. Lloyd did not tell the Ambassador that the British representative at the United Nations was being instructed to veto the resolution. Nor did he tell the Ambassador that Pineau was expected in London in half an hour to join in handing ultimatums to Egypt and Israel, so phrased as to invite Israel to advance 100 miles into Egyptian territory. Indeed, by a third suppression he gave the opposite impression. At this time tripartite discussions were in progress in Washington



for restraining Israel in implementation of the Tripartite Declaration. Eisenhower had declared two days earlier that the United States would honour its pledge, and, although the Declaration had become rather a moth-eaten affair, Britain and France had indicated, by engaging in the talks, that they were prepared at least to consider the sort of joint action envisaged by it. But Eden had decided that the Declaration did not apply. He so informed the House of Commons later in the day. But nobody told the American Ambassador that the Washington talks were an empty farce. In retrospect it is easy to see that no tripartite action would have been the sort of action which Britain and France wanted; this was the real reason for the tacit abrogation of the Tripartite Declaration.<sup>1</sup>

At 4.15 p.m. (GMT) the British and French governments delivered ultimatums to both Israel and Egypt requiring them to stop fighting and withdraw to ten miles from the Suez Canal (which is 100 miles from the Israeli-Egyptian border on the Egyptian side); they declared that they would occupy Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez if these conditions were not met within twelve hours. Anglo-French air attacks on Egypt began the next day.

Since the Uniting for Peace Resolutions were adopted in 1950 the United Nations is no longer hamstrung by a veto in the Security Council but may express itself through an emergency meeting of the General Assembly. The Assembly, convened immediately after the Anglo-French veto on 30 October, met on 1 November, and in the early hours of the 2nd it resolved by 64 votes to 5 (only Australia and New Zealand ranged themselves with Britain, France, and Israel) in favour of an immediate cease-fire, the withdrawal of Israeli and Egyptian troops to their borders, a general embargo on the entry of military goods into the area of conflict, and immediate steps to reopen the canal after a cease-fire. During the debate the British representative said that his government would be delighted if the United Nations would

1. The reason given by Eden was that the Declaration no longer applied to Egypt. This was beside the point. The declared object of the Declaration was to keep the peace in the Middle East in the interests of the Western powers. It was a declaration of intent by them and not a compact with Middle Eastern states. The obligations which it created were obligations between the three Western powers themselves and nothing done by Egypt could affect these obligations.



take over 'the physical task of maintaining peace in the area'.

In the House of Commons on 2 November, Eden evaded pressure to accept the Assembly's resolution, on the plea that he had not yet had time to study a full report of the debate. Further Anglo-French consultations took place that evening in London, and on the next day (3rd) the two governments announced conditions for complying with the Assembly's resolution. These were: that a U.N. force should be sent to keep the peace until both the canal and the Arab-Israeli disputes were settled; and that Israel and Egypt should agree to accept such a force. Unless and until these conditions were accepted the two governments would continue their action in order to stop hostilities and safeguard the canal.

The canal was already blocked and hostilities had perforce stopped since Israel, in a brilliant campaign, had defeated all Egyptian forces in the Sinai peninsula by 2 November. Egypt and Israel therefore accepted the resolutions on the 4th and 5th respectively. The British and the French on the other hand had not yet put any troops ashore or achieved their declared intention of occupying Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez, but the much-travelled Pineau was again on his way to London and at dawn on the 5th Anglo-French paratroops touched Egyptian soil at last.

On the same day the Governor of Port Said decided to surrender and a message flashed to London caused great excitement in the House of Commons, but the Governor had reckoned without his men who refused to cease fire, and Nasser over-rode his action. On the next morning sea-borne forces arrived from Malta and most of the day was taken up with surrender parleys which came to nothing, whereupon the town was taken by storm after being severely shelled. There has been much controversy over the Egyptian casualties at Port Said. The British figure was 100 killed and 540 wounded. Other estimates ranged up to 12,000. It is normal in a case like this for estimates on both sides to be wide of the mark, but which was least wide we cannot yet say; probably one should multiply the British figure by ten and divide the higher figure also by ten. Sir Walter Monckton went to Port Said to see and report, but on his return he made a vague statement and gave up his job of co-ordinating information services.

After the capture of Port Said the allied commanders prepared



to advance down the canal and take Ismailia and Suez. Estimates of the time needed for this operation vary between seven days and six weeks, but the test never came because the military operation was beginning at a moment when economically and politically the game was already lost, and that night orders were received to cease fire. The run on sterling had assumed alarming proportions and a few more days of hostilities would have made a devaluation of the pound unavoidable. In London there was a stormy Cabinet meeting.<sup>1</sup> The Russians were threatening to shoot rockets on to Western capitals and – the decisive factor – the Americans were privately threatening economic sanctions. To much screeching of political gears, Eden was forced to go into reverse. The British and French governments agreed to stop fighting. This marked the end of the operation and the beginning of the next phase – retreat.

## 2

*Motives and methods*

THE reasons given by the British government for its action varied. The first, given at the time of the attack, were the need to separate the combatants and secure the canal. The methods adopted to achieve these unexceptionable objects were strange. One might have expected an ultimatum to the aggressor coupled with threats, and if necessary action, to compel him to return behind his frontiers, but instead of stopping the aggressor the British and French required both sides to withdraw to lines 10 miles from the canal, which was 100 miles inside the violated frontier, and quickly followed their ultimatums with bombing attacks on Egyptian airfields and forces in the field. This partiality, not to say encouragement, for Israel was in marked contrast to the British reaction on the occasion of the last big Israeli raid into Jordan, when Britain had been very sharp with Israel.

1. Two Ministers had submitted their resignations by this time. They were Mr Anthony Nutting, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, and Sir Edward Boyle, Financial Secretary to the Treasury. The Prime Minister himself retired exhausted from the scene a little later and spent three weeks in Jamaica.



The Anglo-French action could hardly be said to separate the combatants except in the sense that the annihilation of one of them must leave the other side alone and so separate. Ground forces, which could have separated the combatants, were not landed until after the Israelis had defeated the Egyptians and were no longer in contact with a combatant force. The Anglo-French attack also failed to secure the canal. So far from making it safe, the action led immediately to its blocking.

The delay in landing troops until after the Israeli victory placed the British and French in the same embarrassing position in which they had found themselves on the eve of the Crimean War. Their professed objects required no further action but their forces had not yet engaged the enemy. In 1853 the settlement of the dispute about the Holy Places did not prevent Britain and France from going to war. In 1956 the Israeli victory in the Sinai peninsula did not prevent them from going on (for a bit) with their military operations. The explanation in both cases is the same. In 1853 they wanted to fight and beat the Russians; in 1956 they wanted to fight and beat Nasser.

About ten days after the attack the 'police action' plea was superseded by the 'forest fire' plea. According to this Britain and France had intervened in the nick of time to prevent a general blaze in the Middle East and a Russian coup. This plea was presented late and in contradictory forms. There was no evidence that Nasser was about to start a war; he was certainly ill prepared to do so; and if he had so intended, the path of Western wisdom would have been to let him do so and then let the Israelis beat him with the approval of all the world and with outside help only if needed.

The British and French had ample reasons for disliking Nasser and wishing to see the end of him. There was the fear that he intended to unify the Arab world and then make the West dance to his tune by virtue of his control of so much oil. There was his riling interference in Africa all the way from Nairobi to Casablanca. There were his purchases of arms from the Russians. So it was possible to argue that he was likely to set the Middle East and even the whole world ablaze, or alternatively that he was consciously or unconsciously delivering the Middle East into Russian hands. In other words, Nasser was a menace like Hitler, and although he



had done nothing wrong (except blockade and threaten Israel—it is not wrong to arm one's country nor, according to most lawyers, to nationalize) his destruction would be a meritorious act.

These arguments are thin. Any major power could have stopped Nasser from starting a war at any time. Hitler with his 80 million Germans and all the latest weapons of war in the heart of Europe was a menace of a completely different order. Egypt was a power of no consequence. Even the united Arabs, 40 million comparatively ill-educated inhabitants of backward countries, would not begin to be even a secondary power; and they were far from united and many of them disliked Nasser a great deal. Nasser was a Hitler-like menace to Israel but not to anybody else. His Arab opponents planned to leave him to contrive his own downfall, and the Israelis would almost certainly have brought him down in November if British and French intervention had not enabled him to escape the humiliation of defeat by Israel.

Alternatively, it was alleged that the danger was not Nasser but Nasser-cum-Russia, or more simply Russia. On this theory the Anglo-French action was taken to frustrate a Russian plot. The conjunction of Nasser and the Russians was a marriage of limited convenience. Nasser planned, dangerously enough, to use Russia against the West. The Russians planned to use Arab nationalism against the West. So long therefore as Arab nationalism was directed against the West, Arab and Russian interests coincided. It is a common delusion of rising nationalists that they can use major powers for their own ends, but while they try to play off one against another they never intend to substitute a new foreign domination for an old – although this may on occasions be the unwelcome result of their overconfident diplomacy. Nasser, while trying to extract every ounce of profit out of the Cold War, was aware of the length of spoon needed to sup with the Russians. Only if forced by the West will an Arab leader ally himself with the Communists, and even then reluctantly. The Anglo-French attack went a long way to forging this very dangerous alliance.

The Russian danger is real, considerable, and ancient. Russian ambitions in the Middle East threaten Western interests. The questions are: what were the Russians doing to further their ambitions and what was the right thing to do to stop them? The Russians had been selling arms to Egypt for nearly a year. This



was a known fact. To it was added in November the theory that the Russians intended to go further than the sale of arms and either invade the Middle East or make Egypt a satellite.

There was no secret about the supply of arms or about the technicians who went with them. A week after the attack a minister claimed in the House of Commons that the attack had disclosed sensational stocks of Russian weapons, but a few days later another minister said that the existence of these arms had been known before the attack was made. Later still the Foreign Secretary produced a list which included 100 MIGs, 50 IL 28 bombers, 300 medium and heavy tanks, over 100 self-propelled guns, 500 pieces of artillery, 2 destroyers, 4 minesweepers, and 20 MTBs. In fact, accurate figures had been known since the beginning of the year and they had been published and debated in July, when the government made light of them. Yet the supply was undoubtedly a danger. Since Britain and its allies also sell arms to Egypt and other Middle East countries, the way to deal with this situation was either to cap Russian deliveries by further Western deliveries, or to rally international support against Russia by calling attention to the dangers and proposing joint action to bring pressure to bear on Russia to limit the arms race. But Britain was reluctant to step up supplies to Israel and refused to bring the matter before the Security Council. The action eventually taken at the end of October left the Russians as free as before to sell arms and the Egyptians and others keener than ever to get them.

If Russian actions in the matter of arms were clear, Russian designs were necessarily not so clear. It was therefore possible to put about, even if belatedly, the theory that the Russians were intending to invade the Middle East or make Egypt a satellite. Given the Cold War, it was not difficult to create alarm and belief along these lines.

The basis for the belief in a Russian invasion, apart from the tendency to believe the Russians to be up to everything, was the extent of the Russian supplies found in Egypt. Although the supplies were much what they had been reported to be, there were some curious items. A million blankets, for instance, seemed too considerate an allowance for an Egyptian army of 100,000 men – 10 blankets each in a hot climate – and there were supplies of Russian ammunition to fit weapons which had not been de-



livered. Were the weapons coming later and the Russians with them? This question remains of course unanswered. So do others. If the British and French governments had good reason to fear a Russian invasion, why did they despair of getting anybody else to think their reasons good? Their coyness before the attack and for a whole week after it is the more remarkable when one reflects that a pinch of evidence in the right places would have prevented the rift with the United States, the strain on the Commonwealth, ministerial resignations, huge amazement and dismay in Britain, the rallying of the Arabs round Nasser, and the U.N. vote of censure.

In the face of reflections like these a fresh plea was advanced. The United States, it was said, was so blind to the Russian menace that a heroic act of self-immolation by Britain and France was needed to awake in Washington a proper awareness of the situation and to get the Americans to do something about it. Yet it might have been worth testing this assumption first by presenting the Anglo-French case to the Americans instead of keeping them in the dark, for the notion that the Americans discount threats from Russia is grotesque. It has been commoner hitherto to charge the Americans with a pathological propensity for seeing Russians everywhere.

There remains the satellite theory. Even if the Russians were not about to appear on the scene themselves, they might be acquiring effective control of the Egyptian government and army. A satellite is a state which is subservient to the will of another state against its own will. This unwillingness is essential, since without it the relationship is an alliance and not satellitism. Satellitism requires a foreign army and a common frontier, as the Yugoslav case showed. The Russians cannot have satellites in the Middle East. They could not send a Russian army there without starting a world war and they cannot make much use of the Egyptian army. Either that army will be inefficient and lose its arms, or it will be efficient and then it will be an Egyptian nationalist army and not a satellite one. The giving of arms is not a military move but a political one. The object is to gain goodwill and to bolster up one faction in a country against another. The right answer therefore is not military but political – to which we come back in the last part of this book.



For our present purpose in examining motives, we conclude that it is hardly possible that Britain and France should have attacked Egypt in order to prevent a Russian invasion or annexation of Egypt, because there would be no point – to put it no higher – in concealing such a motive from the Americans. If the British and French had foreknowledge of a forest fire, they were criminally delinquent in waiting for it to break into a blaze before doing anything about it or notifying the American and other fire brigades. The Israeli attack was launched from Eilat, only a few miles from one of the largest British bases in the Middle East at Aqaba. According to the Minister of Defence British forces reported Israeli movements on 27 October; they could see the match being lit to start a fire. But the British and French governments, far from quenching the fire, themselves scattered some dangerous sparks around and invited the Russians to enter on the scene with a pair of bellows.

Besides the 'police action' and 'forest fire' pleas there was intermittently advanced the plea that Britain and France acted on their own to do a job that the United Nations should be doing but was too slow and incompetent to do.

The Security Council met within a few hours of the Israeli attack and voted that same day on a cease-fire resolution. This resolution was vetoed by Britain and France, who thus prevented immediate action which could have been put in train before the Anglo-French ultimatums, short though they were, expired. Upon the stultification of the Security Council, however, the Assembly lost no time, met and passed a resolution in the early hours of 2 November. At this point Britain and France, which had deprived the United Nations of some of its initial promptness, were seen to have deprived it also of some of its effectiveness. The normal thing for the United Nations to do, upon resolving on a certain course of action, is to request a major power (or powers) with adequate and nearby resources to take the necessary action. This is what happened in Korea when the United States was commissioned with others to go to the help of the South Koreans against the North. In the event of an outbreak of fighting in the Middle East the United Nations might have been expected to call on the British forces in that area to take similar action. That they did not do so was entirely due to the fact that the British were



already taking action which was not the action desired by the majority. Britain and France, while claiming to do the United Nations' work, were in fact preventing it, and the reason why the two powers did not have recourse to the United Nations was not the fear that United Nations action would be slow or ineffective but the certainty that it would be different.

All these pleas in support of the Anglo-French action are unconvincing. Sometimes the seeker after truth will do best to look the facts in the face and find the answer there. The real motives for the Anglo-French attack on Egypt are sufficiently clearly written in the record. They were: to cause the fall of Nasser and establish international control over the canal.

Before passing from motives to consequences it is necessary to say something about methods. The British and French had certain reasons for doing what they did, and in the event their actions had certain consequences which we shall detail later. But how did they set about the business?

This is where we come to the question of collusion. Collusion has become very generally assumed but it has not been openly admitted. Nor has it been denied except in a form in which it is not alleged. So it is important to be clear about what is alleged. The allegations are: that France was privy to an Israeli intention to attack Egypt; that France encouraged Israel (notably by increasing supplies of arms and probably also by offering to use the French veto to stop action against Israel through the Security Council); that Britain was informed of the substance of this arrangement and acquiesced; and that Britain and France planned to make an attack on Egypt under cover of the Israeli attack. It is not alleged that Britain encouraged or plotted with Israel directly, nor is it alleged that Israel knew of the plan for a separate but contemporaneous Anglo-French attack. The question to be answered is not whether Britain had foreknowledge of this or that date, but whether Britain and France had agreed that, in the event of an Israeli attack on Egypt, they too would attack Egypt.

The mainspring of the Anglo-French scheme to use an Israeli attack as cover for a separate Anglo-French attack was the French recourse to Israel as a way of subduing Nasser. While Britain still hoped to play Iraq against Egypt, the French saw Arab nationalism whole and turned to Israel. How early the first moves were made



cannot be said, but a famous Israeli ex-terrorist was given the unusual honour of addressing the French National Assembly in the summer, and on 23 September Ben-Gurion said, in an obvious reference to France, that Israel had at last found a true ally. From about August French deliveries of arms, which included jet fighters and tanks, were increased, but the figures ceased to be given, and by the middle of October at the latest they were being considerably falsified. Israeli officers attended planning conferences in Paris, and shortly before the attack a cat peeped out of a bag when the French Prime Minister, trying to satisfy a questioner in the Assembly, said that there was a diplomatic secret to be kept. This could have been bluff. But things were being kept secret by the British as well as by the French. American diplomatic and service emissaries reported a sudden cessation of the usual confidences and contacts, and the situation became so markedly abnormal that Dulles instructed his Ambassadors in London and Paris to try to repair the lines. High officials in Whitehall and embassies abroad were kept in ignorance of matters within their province.

## 3

*The balance sheet*

THE Suez venture is one of those episodes which make an indelible mark on the course of events; it will always have a chapter in history books.

The immediate consequences were the blocking of the canal and sabotage to pipelines which reduced the rate of flow of piped oil to the Mediterranean from 118 million tons to 16 million tons a year. Oil from the Persian Gulf had to take the longer journey round the Cape; longer journeys mean fewer journeys and fewer deliveries. The diversion of tankers to the Caribbean further reduced the supply. It was possible to replace some of the loss by working round the Cape and importing oil from the New World, but it was impossible to do more than bring Western Europe's supplies back, after two months, to three-quarters of its requirements. The closing of the canal to dry goods reduced imports of raw materials for industry, enforced short working,



and brought a threat of unemployment. Shipping for exports became scarcer, with a further threat of unemployment in the export industries and a threat to the pound.

Even since the end of the war the strength of sterling had included significant elements of an intangible kind which had kept the value of the pound at a higher level than Britain's material resources strictly warranted. These elements were international confidence and British banking skill. The position of sterling was therefore delicate and any blow to confidence would necessarily have far-reaching effects. There were signs of nervousness about the pound before the attack on Egypt, and immediately after the attack there was a rush to turn sterling into dollars or German marks. Britain had to sell dollar securities and (ominous reminder of 1932) default on a part of the American debt in order to save the pound. The position was temporarily stabilized, but there was still so much sterling in nervous foreign hands (including Arab hands) that a fresh selling bout could force a devaluation. Apart from the threat to sterling as a currency there was also a threat to the sterling area as a banking system. Britain was the area's banker and profited from this position, but the liquid reserves, without which a banker cannot operate, had been precariously low for years, and in November 1956 they suffered a loss of \$279 million (as compared with \$14 million in the previous November). This drain brought into the open the question whether the banker could continue to perform his functions, and the possibility of the break-up of the sterling area.<sup>1</sup>

In the Middle East the Anglo-Iraqi alliance proved a broken

1. Britain's domestic economy was hit by the increase in the price of oil, which affected in turn the price of everything which depends on oil for its manufacture or transport. Devaluation would mean a further burden since it would increase the cost of all imported goods and raw materials. The necessary adjustment involves substantial cuts in spending, such as only the social services and defence can provide. Although a Chancellor of the Exchequer may tinker with the welfare state, it is unthinkable that he can dismantle it, and so he is forced to consider a defence cut of the order of £500 million a year. So another question is brought into the open: can Britain afford H-bombs and the whole paraphernalia of a giant military power? A reduction in defence expenditure inevitably reduces Britain's weight in the world, but the maintenance of the programme may sink Britain under its own weight.



reed. Despite suggestions of an Anglo-Egyptian entente after the Sudan and Suez agreements, Britain had veered back to the policy of supporting Iraq against Egypt for leadership in the Arab world. Iraq was indeed jealous of Egypt, but Britain had miscalculated Iraq's feelings. Attaching insufficient importance to Arab nationalism, the British government had not realized that a direct attack on Egypt would range Iraq on the Egyptian and not on the British side. Whatever the ruling class in Iraq might wish, there was too much pro-Egyptian feeling in Iraq to enable its government to come out on the British side. Even the Iraqi leaders themselves could not approve British action, since they could hardly establish their claim to Arab leadership by siding with Britain against another Arab state. The British attack therefore forced Iraq into the united Arab camp, and as if to make assurance doubly sure Britain associated itself with Israel without apparently counting the cost on the attitude of Iraq, where anti-Israeli feeling was more intense than in any other Arab state. Iraq, which had hoped to secure the overthrow of Nasser by playing a waiting game and leaving the Egyptians themselves to do the deed, resented a British step which ruined their own game. They also blamed Britain for the stoppage in the flow of oil and royalties which was a direct consequence of the attack. Iraq took the lead, supported by Pakistan, in proposing the exclusion of Britain from the Baghdad Pact, and it was only the milder reactions of Turkey which substituted condemnation for expulsion.

The other Arab states rallied round Egypt (but raising their voices rather than their fingers) and the occasion gave them an opportunity of sensing their collective threatening power. When nine of them<sup>1</sup> met at Beirut on 13 November they felt strong enough to make demands for the withdrawal of troops under the threat of economic sanctions. Saudi Arabia and Syria broke off diplomatic relations and the former stopped the flow of oil to Bahrain. Jordan notified Britain that air bases in Jordan were not available for British use and later denounced the Anglo-Jordanian treaty. Protests of various kinds were made by other states and there were riots and strikes in the Persian Gulf sheikdoms of

1. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen.



Bahrain and Kuwait. Nasser, far from being dashed to the ground, was raised in Arab esteem. His own bad acts were submerged. By making him a victim, the British and French allowed him to be regarded as an innocent victim. They handed a sinner a halo.

Nasser's ambitions were not the only ones to be advanced. The Russians, too, were given an opportunity.

Russia has been a Middle East power for well over a century. After the second world war, as after the first, it drew in its horns in this part of the world, but this was an abnormal state of affairs which could not last. Russia was of all the major powers the nearest to the Middle East and there was no hope of permanently excluding Russia from a part in the diplomatic affairs of the area. Although Russia had most often sought to penetrate the Middle East via Persia (and tried again in 1945), its re-entry was effected in 1955 via Egypt and the Czech arms deal. Thereafter the Russian toe was in the Middle Eastern door; it would have been as unrealistic to hold a conference on Middle East affairs without Russia as it would have been to do such a thing in the nineteenth century. But diplomatic presence is not the same as physical presence. The Russians did not bring direct power to bear in the Middle East; they had no troops there; and it was a vital Western interest to see that they should not do so, since this bridgehead between Asia and Africa is a front door to both continents. Equally, however, there was little indication that the Russians intended to do this. They observed how the presence of British forces turned the Arab world against Britain and they were prepared to profit from this situation without hanging the same millstone round their own necks. They could not put forces into the Middle East without antagonizing the Arabs, unless the West gave them a chance to do so. Yet this is what the British and French did. By attacking Egypt they gave the Russians that one chance in a million of sending a force to the Middle East with Arab consent instead of Arab offence. They threatened to take it (though they may have been bluffing) but were prevented by a prompt and unequivocal American warning. But the Russians had seen the door into the Middle East open wider than it had ever opened for them before, and it was Anglo-French action which swung it. Had the Americans been aligned with the



British and French, the West would have been totally discredited in Arab eyes and the door would have been opened still further. Russian propaganda, sensing the importance of this point, has concentrated on trying to identify the United States with the Anglo-French action, but American disagreement with Britain and France has been sufficiently clear and the Americans remain a powerful obstacle to Russian designs. Nevertheless, there is a widespread belief among the Arabs (though not in ruling circles) that the Russians saved the Arabs from the British and the French; British and French prestige and influence have shrunk to vanishing point.

The Anglo-French attack also had important consequences beyond the Middle East – in the United States, the Dominions, Africa, the Nato countries, and Britain itself. Some part of the damage to the Anglo-American alliance has already been made apparent in the foregoing narrative. The policies and the temper of the two Anglo-Saxon allies had drifted so far apart that communication ceased and accusations of bad faith were made on both sides. The Americans claimed that the British had acted with such conscious dishonour that they had felt obliged positively to deceive their allies about their intentions. In Britain it was claimed, after the collapse of the operation had become evident, that the Americans had encouraged the Anglo-French venture but had changed their minds and disavowed their earlier support. It is necessary to examine these allegations in some detail.

British Ministers have averred in private and have let it be bruited abroad that they were let down by Dulles. There are two counts in the indictment, two specific occasions of backsliding – the immediate tripartite discussions after Nasser's nationalization at the end of July, and the later Scua proposals.

When Dulles flew to London to join the talks in July it was reported on all sides that he was coming to restrain the British and French in much the same mood as the British had restrained the Americans at the height of the Indo-China crisis in 1954. Some months later, however, a different story gained ground. According to this Dulles came to London to explain that the Americans could not join the British and French in an attack on Egypt because of the impending election, but gave them the green light and wished them luck. It is just possible to accept the pro-



position that some members of the British government really believed this to be the case, but it is exceedingly difficult to believe that they were not mistaken. The story fits in with nothing that went before or came after, and if it had been circulating at the time it would have seemed incredible. One is reminded again of the Dien Bien Phu episode. Then, too, Dulles came to London and conferred with the British and subsequently accusations of double-dealing were bandied about. Perhaps there is in Dulles or Eden, or both, a certain inability to make things clear. This would seem to be the most charitable explanation. In any case it was imprudent of Eden and his colleagues to accept in August, without the most explicit statements, a view of American policy so contrary to the whole tenor of that policy over a great many years.

The second count in the indictment against the Americans is similar and arises out of the Scua discussions. The British case is that Eden and his colleagues believed, and were justified in believing, that Dulles shared their interpretation of the functions of Scua as a means of bringing pressure to bear on Nasser. Even this version does not allege that Dulles was conniving at an attack on Egypt such as was actually launched without a pretext at the end of October, but it does allege that he would have been glad to see the British and French take military or economic action against Nasser and was even willing to help to provide a pretext. Again the story sounds incredible and is entirely out of line with all that is known of American policies, good or bad. Further, even if the British had believed that Dulles approved their attitude towards Scua at this stage, they were certainly undeceived during the Dulles-Lloyd exchanges in New York a full fortnight before their actual resort to force.

To acquit the Americans of these charges is not to applaud their Middle Eastern behaviour in the years that led up to the crisis. We have already noticed Dulles' failings, but he did not cavalierly imperil the Anglo-American alliance nor was he lacking in the common courtesies and standards of honesty due to allies.

We have examined the collusion story. In the context of the Anglo-American alliance it suffices to point out that any Anglo-French scheming of the kind alleged would of itself amount to a



tacit abrogation of the American alliance. Whether or not there was collusion, the normal diplomatic and service exchanges between the Americans on the one hand and the British and the French on the other were broken off without any reason being given to the Americans, efforts at the highest level to repair the breach failed, and Eisenhower's attempts to restrain Ben-Gurion's impending attack got no support from his partners of the Tripartite Declaration. Eden's plea that there was no time to consult the Americans evaporated when Mollet admitted later that the real reason was the Anglo-French belief that the Americans would not approve. Lloyd's treatment of the American Ambassador was an extreme example of the sort of behaviour which transformed Anglo-American differences into deep American anger at so much calculated deception. Eisenhower himself was the last man to bear with such an affront to his soldier's conception of honour, confidence in Britain was severely shaken at many levels, and the fact that American arms supplied for the defence of Europe had helped the attackers did not escape bitter notice. The Anglo-French action encouraged the American neo-isolationists who set their faith in Fortress America instead of the internationalism of men like Hopkins and Acheson, and caused Americans to ask themselves whether Britain was not becoming as much of a liability as France in countering Russian designs in the vast Asian and African continents. Roosevelt had believed that Europe no longer counted; his forebodings revived. British influence and prestige, which had been out of proportion to actual British strength owing to Britain's reputation for political sagacity and morality, dwindled to what was more strictly appropriate to a small European island power.

There were similar convulsions in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was stricken in two ways – by the omission of the quasi-constitutional practice of consultation and by the adoption of measures which outraged half of it.

Although in the circumstances it might have been too much to expect the usual confidential exchanges between London and New Delhi, the omission to keep Ottawa, Canberra, and Wellington informed was strange, and there was a special case for consulting the Moslem member of the Commonwealth, Pakistan. The plea that there was no time sounds odd in the age of the telegraph



and resident High Commissioners, and even odder when it transpires that the omission occurred on more than one occasion during the Suez crisis and not merely on the eve of the attack. There was no question of prolonged discussion or of getting permission, but only of giving information and considering the reply, if any. One of the curious links that holds the Commonwealth together is the practice and presumption of consultation. This does not mean that one Commonwealth partner has to seek the permission of the others before doing what it proposes to do; it means that he should tell them privately in advance and give them a chance of commenting privately in advance. One member, informed of an impending action by another member, may say something like this: *Do you realize that, if you do this, you will be putting me in a difficult spot for such-and-such reasons?* The other partner may choose to go ahead none the less, but if he does so after this exchange no bones are broken.

Among the older Dominions Australia and New Zealand supported the British government, though not solidly (in Australia there were Cabinet rifts as in Britain), and South Africa was neutral, but in Canada only one of the principal papers approved Anglo-French action and official opinion was more critical than it had ever been in the whole history of the Dominion. The Canadian Minister for External Affairs said that British action had brought the Commonwealth to 'the verge of dissolution' and this judgement was not made in the heat of the moment but a month after the attack. The newer Dominions were aghast and in both New Delhi and Karachi there was strong pressure on the Prime Ministers from many quarters to leave the Commonwealth, pressure which lesser men than Nehru and Suhrawardy might have been unable to resist.

In Africa the consequences cannot yet be assessed, but may prove the most enduring of all in the long run. The humiliation of two great colonial powers attacking an African state may be compared with the effects in Asia of Russia's defeat by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War. The news of it has spread like a forest fire and has lost nothing in the telling. The task of the British in controlling the pace of the advance towards independence has become much more difficult and the retreat of the colonial powers has opened up the prospect of a power vacuum which neither the



Americans nor the Russians can afford to allow the other to fill. Both have for some time been devoting more and more money and attention to the study of African languages, customs, and politics, and the two giant powers may find themselves drifting into a contest for Africa not unlike the famous nineteenth-century grab by the European powers.

African nationalists, a small but influential minority, fundamentally opposed to foreign rule, suspicious of their white rulers, conscious of India's successful fight for freedom, and of the past glories of the African empires of Egypt and Morocco, have seen the old imperialist Adam peeping out from behind the mask that conservatives in Britain and France assumed ten years ago. They are now convinced that the new multi-racial and multi-coloured Commonwealth has not displaced the old Empire in the hearts and minds of half the British and French people. If the Asian Dominions had left the Commonwealth, turning it once more into a white man's club, East Africans certainly, and West Africans probably, would have abandoned thoughts of a future for their countries in the Commonwealth and would have turned instead to Delhi to form a new coloured Commonwealth of the Bandung countries with other Asians and Africans, thus introducing the colour question into international politics at the highest level.

One consequence of the crisis in the Middle East has been the consolidation of African, Middle Eastern, and Asian states. In a crisis there is no longer any question of eastern states acting or voting in one way and Middle Eastern and African states in another. They all come together, and if they come together in opposition to a colonial power the Communist states are only too happy to support them. This grouping is immensely significant not only at the United Nations but in world politics at large and it has special implications for British power and influence in Africa and Asia.

The consequences in the Nato countries can be more briefly explained. Many of Britain's and France's European allies were more hardly hit by the blocking of the Canal than Britain and France themselves. With their economies jeopardized, suddenly faced with severe privations, they not unnaturally felt bitter and asked what sort of an alliance Nato was, if two of the senior partners could thus gamble with the welfare of their fellows.



Finally, we must note some of the consequences in Britain itself. Opinion was so sharply divided and emotions so deeply stirred that the historical parallels most frequently cited were the Irish question and the Boer War. In Parliament there were scenes of excitement and disarray more often associated with less sedate legislatures. Denunciation of the nationalization of the canal was expressed on all sides. Nasser was very generally disliked and throughout the crisis no small part was played by the ordinary Englishman's contempt for Egyptians. When later Britain actually went to war, Eden's popularity rose because many people approved of having a bash at a man (not a white man) who had thumbed his nose at Britain. These people were heartened at the sight of action. This, the Prime Minister told them in a broadcast, was a time for action and a time for courage. But others doubted whether the action was the right action or the courage directed at a worthy object. There were unusual queues of people wanting to emigrate.

From the first there was conflict over method. Government supporters later claimed that the Prime Minister had been misled by Gaitskell into believing that he could count on Opposition support and a united nation, but on the very first day Gaitskell, however vehement his denunciation of Nasser, sounded a warning note against going it alone; he urged a reference to the Security Council (on the Korean model) and deplored any use of force in contravention of existing engagements. But Eden insisted on remaining sole judge of when and where to use force, and the gap between the parties was widened by the British veto of the American resolution in the Security Council, by British prevarication over the General Assembly's cease-fire and withdrawal resolutions, and by the evidence of collusion. Collusion, with its stain on the integrity of British public life, worried many people regardless of party who did not relish the prospect of British politics being dragged down to levels hitherto reserved for foreigners. Collusion, it was believed, prompted the various expressions of ecclesiastical disquiet in Press and Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of Eden was not confined to methods – to the way the

1. Another source of non-party disquiet was the attempt to pervert the B.B.C. into an instrument of propaganda, jeopardizing its world-wide reputation for truthful reporting.



government was going about things. There was also intense criticism of the policy itself. Nasser's nationalization of the canal was undeniably brusque and alarming, but it was not clearly unlawful; many lawyers took the view that it was a legitimate exercise of sovereignty. Eden's policy was to insist that the nationalization decree must be rescinded and the canal placed under international control. He and Lloyd stated repeatedly that they were prepared to use force to achieve this. In the last weeks before the attack, when the prospects of a negotiated settlement had brightened, the British and French governments did nothing to smooth the path of negotiation but embarked secretly on that of war.

The criticism of this policy was two-fold: that it could only be fulfilled at disastrous cost and that the whole conception was dangerously anachronistic. Few people in Britain objected to international control in itself.<sup>1</sup> It is plainly more satisfactory to have the management of an operation than the right to complain of somebody else's mismanagement. International supervision, which is the alternative to international control, gives only the lesser right and is to that extent less satisfactory, but from the beginning of the crisis in July it was urged against the government's policy that to ask Nasser to de-nationalize was to ask for the moon, and that the policy therefore meant war with all the disastrous effects on Britain's international position which in fact occurred and which we have recorded above. The cost was too great. The calculation was wildly wrong.

How did it come about that responsible and experienced men could calculate so badly? The essential error in their calculation was the out-of-date assumptions that lay at its root. They were kicking against the pricks. In the next part we shall examine this policy more fully and contrast it with what we believe to be a more sensible and practicable course, but before doing this we must in conclusion mention one last consequence of the attack – the complete failure of the operation.

A force of something like 100,000 men<sup>2</sup> was assembled to

1. It was otherwise in Asia where international control was rejected as an infringement of sovereignty.

2. Some 20,000 landed. The British outnumbered the French by about two to one.



crack the Egyptian nut. Preparations began in July, but after 30 October a week passed before any troops touched Egyptian soil. Various explanations have been offered for this delay. The Israeli attack, which was to have triggered the Anglo-French attack, was put forward several days for fear of American attempts to stop it. Besides, the military planners appear to have mounted an unnecessarily large and elaborate operation, prefacing the landings by days of bombing in an attempt to save British lives. But whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the forces took a long time to arrive, were told to cease fire within twenty-four hours of their landing, and were then withdrawn after an undignified and fruitless wrangle. All in all, the expedition was about as successful as the classic Walcheren expedition of 1806 which is commonly cited as the supreme example of a government's lack of determination, foresight, and competence.

## 4

*Retreat and the U.N.*

THE retreat from Egypt took the form of substituting a United Nations Emergency Force (Unef) for the Anglo-French and Israeli forces. There was some attempt to claim that the invasion had paved the way for international action, led to the creation of a new kind of international force, and given the United Nations a new authority and competence. The Anglo-French attack was a cause of Unef in the sense that Dick Turpin's activities were a cause of the Bow Street Runners – but in no more creditable sense. If credit belongs to one government more than to another, it belongs to the Canadian government.

For several years Canada has been urging upon Britain, France, and the United States the creation of an international force to stand on the troubled frontiers of the Middle East and keep the peace. Within a day of the attack on Egypt, Canada turned to the United Nations as a means of confining the conflict, extricating the combatants, and later promoting a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Canadian statesmen were the first to see opportunity in crisis and to propose measures to remedy both the immediate and



the antecedent perils. Between Nasser's nationalization at the end of July and the Anglo-French attack three months later, Canada had issued a series of private warnings to London against the use of force except through the United Nations, and when, without any hint or consultation, Britain took the law into its own hands Canada was at first incredulous and then most seriously alarmed. Enjoying with India the closest two-way links within the Commonwealth, Canada was much more aware than London of the danger to the Commonwealth, while being at the same time no less sensitive to the threat to the Anglo-American alliance, since the first element in Canada's international position is its intermediate position between Britain and the United States. The Commonwealth and the Anglo-American alliance – or the Anglo-American-Canadian triangle, as it has been called – are the data of Canadian foreign policy, because the last things Canada wants to have to do are to choose between London and Washington or to see a colour split in the Commonwealth. Canada was forced to take swift action at the end of October and was able to do so because its leaders already had a policy.

The American cease-fire resolution did not satisfy Canada. It did not look forward to any solution of the canal or Arab-Israel disputes and it did not provide for international action to stop present and future hostilities. So in the first Assembly debate the Canadian Minister for External Affairs, Pearson, brought up Canada's long-standing plan for an international force to remain in the Middle East until both the canal and Arab-Israel disputes were settled. As a result a plan for an international force was adopted alongside the resolutions requiring a cease-fire and withdrawal.

After the cease-fire requirements had been accepted by all combatants, the Assembly pressed for the withdrawal of the attackers and the admission of Unef. Israel had been required to withdraw as early as 2 November before there were any British or French troops on Egyptian soil. The Assembly later repeated the injunction to Israel and also required Britain and France to withdraw. There followed a long diplomatic fencing match. Since each of the three powers had had a different prime motive for attacking, their attitudes to withdrawal differed too. Israel, which had attacked in order to secure better protection against Egypt,



tried to make withdrawal conditional upon satisfactory arrangements by the United Nations against a recurrence of the danger of Egyptian attack. What Israel wanted was the cession of the Gaza strip (a thorn in its side), the neutralization of the Sinai peninsula where Egypt had stationed harassing and other forces,<sup>1</sup> and the lifting of the blockade. There was some sympathy with the substance of these claims but Hammarskjöld refused to bargain over withdrawal and the Israeli forces gradually withdrew.

The French, who had been more concerned to overthrow Nasser than to establish international control over the canal, soon saw the failure of the operation and began to turn their minds to the problem of cutting their losses. They were the least averse to withdrawal provided a face-saving formula could be devised for international and domestic consumption. The British government on the other hand had been intent before all else on establishing international control over the canal. It hoped to be able to transfer this self-appointed task to the United Nations, and so to assuage those of its supporters at home – and especially the Right wing of the Conservative Party who were determined to justify the venture and hold the Government to a 'strong' policy. There was a fundamental rift between the British Conservatives and the United Nations. While the former were persuading themselves that the General Assembly was taking over tasks brought to the fore by British courage and foresight, the latter were simply determined to get the invaders out. The practical effect of the dispute was to delay clearance of the canal.

Unef was assembled with surprising speed owing principally to the efficiency of Hammarskjöld's staff and the goodwill and generosity of a number of governments (those, for instance, which supplied transport aircraft and other facilities). The red tape which the United Nations' critics had expected to tie up any operation was torn to ribbons. Since Egypt was not in breach of the Charter (in respect of the events of the last few days) and was a sovereign member of the organization, the Assembly had stipulated that Hammarskjöld must get Egyptian agreement to the arrival and disposition of foreign forces on Egyptian soil. This was obtained after a visit by Hammarskjöld to Cairo, and the first

1. At one moment Ben-Gurion said Israel would retain Sinai. He got no support and quickly retreated under strong American pressure.



contingents of Unef arrived in Egypt on 15 November. Anglo-French agreement to withdrawal, delayed because of difficulties in keeping the Conservative Party together, was announced at the beginning of December and the retreat was completed before Christmas.

Unef was a token force of no intrinsic military capacity. Its effectiveness derived from what it represented and not from what it was. It was a motley collection of lightly armed units, but it represented the will of a majority of the United Nations, including the most powerful of them. It was effective because of the belief that an attack on, say, a Danish platoon would be treated as an attack on all and each of the nations which had voted to send the Danes to Egypt.

Unef was a realization of the potentialities of the United Nations and a practical demonstration of collective activity. There is a prevalent misconception about the United Nations. It is not a separate entity but a collectivity; we would do better, in talking of the United Nations, to say 'they' rather than 'it'. 'They' are the members, the nations acting together so far as they are willing to act together (and so far, in certain cases, as they are not prevented by the veto of the major powers). The United Nations has no will or forces of its own; it cannot begin or do anything on its own. It has only the purposes and the resources which its members decide to give it and it acts only when and how its members make it act. It is therefore absurd for one of its members to talk, as British ministers and others talked during these months, as though it ought to be taking a particular course, in default of which the British Government would do its job for it. Such talk could only mean that the other members besides Britain ought to do what Britain wants.

The reason why it did not do what the British government said it ought to do – that is, enforce international control over the canal – was not that it could not, but that it did not want to. It was not a question whether the British or the United Nations would do something that everybody agreed should be done. The fact was that the British and the majority differed on what ought to be done. It was therefore hypocritical of the British to pretend that they were taking action because the United Nations was incompetent, when the obstacle was not incompetence but positive



disagreement. It was dishonest to ascribe to the United Nations wishes it did not entertain and then deride it for not carrying them out. It would have been honest and intelligible for the British to say that, British wishes being different from the majority's wishes, the British proposed to ignore the latter and carry out the former, but this would have been tantamount to claiming complete freedom of action for any member so soon as it failed to carry a majority of the other members with it. It can be argued that a state should conduct its international politics on this basis, but then it should not sign the Charter or, if it has signed, it should retract and leave the organization. There is a case for not joining the organization but there is no case for joining and then flouting the conditions of membership. Such behaviour is not merely wrong but also inexpedient, since it riles other members, divides domestic opinion, and makes it difficult for the offending member to object to similar offences by other members. In a world where it is not possible to go it alone, these practical considerations deserve great weight. This is especially the case if, as now seems probable, the United States is more than ever disposed to bring its power to bear in the world through the United Nations.

To say that the United Nations may do something in given circumstances is not to say that it can. It was entitled to require the invaders to withdraw, but it could only fulfil this purpose if members gave it the force as well as the will. To prescribe a course it needs a specified majority of its members; to proceed along that course it needs the active approbation of the stronger members. To resolve and to execute, therefore, it needs both the required majority and the backing of the great. This is what happened in November 1956. A majority wanted the three invaders to be forced out of Egypt and so did the United States, which provided the sanctions. The sanctions need not be military sanctions and need not be openly proclaimed. In the first place the United States threatened Britain and France with economic sanctions. Then, when a force was despatched, it sufficed to send a token force. A large combatant force was not needed, but only an advance guard and an earnest of the power behind it. This is true also of Nato. The Nato forces in Europe are not by themselves an adequate military deterrent to Russian aggression in Europe but they are a symbol of the American resolve to defend Europe.



and a reminder that the Russians may not attack Western Europe without bringing American strategic bombers over the North Pole to Moscow. Nato is not a deterrent but an earnest of a deterrent, and likewise an international force in the Middle East or anywhere else does not have to be a deterrent, although it is nothing and worse than nothing if it is not an earnest of a real deterrent in the background.

*The crisis had been caused by the failure of the policies pursued over many years. What policies can be followed in future with more hope of success?*



*Part Four*  
**POLICIES**

**1**

*Great Power politics*

BRITAIN has two principal interests in the Middle East. These are to get oil and deny to the Russians possession of the bridge-head joining Asia and Africa. The essence of the first question is British relations with the countries which produce the oil or help it on its way. The problem is whether Britain is to exercise dominion over these countries and so guarantee British interests by superior control; or establish relations of cordiality and mutual self-interest such as will ensure the same result in a different way. We will come back to this question after considering the second.

The essence of the second question is great power politics and diplomacy. It involves calculation of the interests, ambitions, and capacities of the major powers and an assessment of the courses available to Britain to thwart presumed Russian courses.

The Russian interests in the Middle East are: to fend off and, if possible, drive out the Americans, the British, and any other enemies who may establish influence or bases in the area; and to substitute Russian influence for that of any other major power. The principal difference between the Russian and the British interest is that the Russians, unlike the British, are not dependent on Middle Eastern oil. This does not mean that the Russians are not interested in the oil. On the contrary, they have a direct interest in cajoling, inciting, or compelling the Arabs to deny the oil to the Western powers, but since this interest is negative rather than acquisitive they have not the same overriding interest in preserving peace and stability in the area. Their ends could well be served by stirring up trouble, so long as they remain outsiders and the Western powers are insiders.

In other respects the Russian position is like that of other powers. As a major world power the Russians are vitally concerned with a strategic area which links Asia with Africa and



contains the principal sea and air connexions between West and East. Russia has the advantage of being the nearest great power to the Middle East, but the corollary of this is that the Middle East is nearer to the U.S.S.R. than to any other great power and abuts directly on one of Russia's flanks.

Like South East Asia and Europe, the Middle East is an area where great powers compete for power and influence; it is not under the control or in the backyard of any single power. The competing powers have in these circumstances a choice between securing their interests by invasion and annexation or by bidding for the favours of the local governments and inhabitants. These are alternative policies because invasion and annexation, however effective in some respects, are not ways of currying favour with the invaded. In central and south-eastern Europe the Russians chose the course of annexation and direct rule after the second world war. So, in a modified form, did the British and French in the Middle East after the first world war. The Russians learned the disadvantages of this method in Europe even before the death of Stalin and tried to modify it soon afterwards. At the same time they observed the British in trouble in the Middle East for fundamentally the same reason – nationalist revulsion against the presence of a powerful foreigner. The failure of MEDO, the withdrawal from the Sudan and the Canal Zone, British troubles in Cyprus, the anti-British propaganda against the Baghdad Pact, and the eclipse of British influence in Jordan were all evidence of the decay of a method that had once worked but was no longer serviceable. It would have been strange if the Russians had not taken advantage of the British weakness to which these episodes bore witness. It would also have been strange if the Russians, having observed and sought to profit from this situation, had aimed to step themselves into Britain's uncomfortable shoes – strange but not impossible, since statesmen must not be presumed to be always sensible.

So long as the British remain in force in the Middle East (whether in Egypt or Cyprus makes little difference) the Russians will seek to aggravate British difficulties, and at this stage Russian interests and Arab nationalist interests coincide. Russian policy is to underline this community of interests by finding what the Arabs want but cannot get from the West, and then giving it to



them. The search has not been difficult. The Western powers, intent on keeping the peace between the Arabs and Israel, refused to give the Arabs all the arms they wanted. The Russians stepped in and filled the gap. By supplying arms they gained favour with the Arabs, they put their foot in the Middle Eastern door which had been closed in their faces for years, and they stirred up trouble in a part of the world where peace was an essential Western interest but not an essential Russian one. By October 1956 they had re-established the Russian claim to have a say in Middle Eastern affairs, and they were watching the Western powers becoming more unpopular and confused without setting up the U.S.S.R. as an extra target for nationalist abuse. A policy of tactful mischief – tactful towards the Arabs, mischievous towards the West – was paying useful dividends and would continue to do so as long as the West played the Cold War in the Middle East in terms of bases and pacts.

The Anglo-French attack on Egypt momentarily transformed the situation. It opened for the Russians the possibility of direct physical intervention in the only circumstances in which it would not antagonize the Arabs. Russian arms had always been welcome. In face of an Anglo-French invasion the Russians themselves might be welcome too. The opportunity was almost too golden to be believed and the Russians were not slow to test it, especially as they were particularly grateful for any chance to distract attention from their defeat in Poland and their grisly victory in Hungary. They offered to allow 'volunteers' to go to the help of Egypt against the British and French – that is to say, they offered to send troops to the Middle East. Nasser hesitated, but the other Arab rulers (who had not been attacked) were not seduced by the emergencies of the moment into adopting the perilous course of using the thin end of a Russian wedge to drive the British and French away. They urged Nasser to refuse. More important from the Russian point of view, the Americans lost no time in saying that they would oppose the entry of Russians on to the scene. But the threat or bluff had its effect: the majority of the U.N., which was hurrying to put in a force to remove the Anglo-French and stymie the Russians, had to leave all major powers out of the composition of this force. The Russians reverted to their tactics of outside help and encouragement to the



Arabs, having been bolstered by a Western move that has all but eliminated British prestige in the Middle East and given the government of Syria a sharp push to the left. The Russian position was improved; the policy continued.

What then should be Western policy in relation to the Russians? The Russians cannot be kept out of the diplomatic affairs of the Middle East. It is inconceivable that a high-level Middle Eastern conference could be held without the U.S.S.R. (unless something quite extraordinary happens in Russia itself). But this is neither unusual nor alarming. While it is true that the Russians were virtually excluded from Middle Eastern affairs after both the world wars, this was an abnormal state of affairs. In this and the previous century it has been normal for Russia to be one of the powers actively concerned with the Middle East; Russia has been a Middle Eastern power as long as Britain and very much longer than the Americans. There are moreover certain advantages in drawing the Russians in once their power has made it impossible to keep them out. Otherwise they are free to play their own game from the touchline, where they have a freer hand and are much less likely to make damaging mistakes.

To admit the Russians to the diplomatic game in the Middle East is one thing, but to allow them to enter the area in force is another. While we cannot exclude them from the diplomatic field, and see some advantage in admitting them, we have the strongest reasons for denying them physical entry. Although it is true that they do not appear at the moment to contemplate entry, and although their entry would set the Arabs against them and so benefit ourselves to that extent, it would also be a deadly thrust at our vital supplies of oil and our whole position in the world. If this is so, a Russian invasion of the Middle East by daylight or by stealth is the sort of threat which we should have to meet by force. Since, however, we are not equipped to fight the U.S.S.R. on our own, we can only secure these vital interests by getting the Americans to make it clear to the Russians that any attempt by the Russians to establish themselves physically in the Middle East will begin a world war in which the Americans will take part at the outset. However unlikely it may be that the Russians will invade the Middle East (the balance of advantage being against such a move), the balance may change or the



Russians may miscalculate, and in that event only the fear of an immediate American riposte can keep the Russians out.

The first object of British policy so far as concerns the U.S.S.R. is therefore to get the Americans to take and express this view about the Middle East. Until they do so, the ultimate stabilizing factor is missing. The Eisenhower Doctrine, a logical sequel to earlier American moves and to American policies of the last ten years in other parts of the world, goes some way in supplying the need, just as the Truman Doctrine of 1947 insulated Greece and Turkey from Russian attack.

The second object of policy is to stand better with the Arabs than the Russians do. This – the only discoverable answer to the threat of Communist subversion – is much easier said than done, but in spite of everything that has happened in the second half of 1956 there are some pieces to be picked up and some new ways of putting them together again. In spite of the volume of tales from diplomats and business men of years of goodwill squandered and contracts and contacts broken, a fraction must survive. The object of policy is to cherish this fraction and discard the attitudes and activities which have so pitifully reduced it. So we come to the first of the two questions posed at the beginning of this chapter.

The fundamental British error has been to persist too long in a policy that has been overtaken by events. As we said earlier, the choice lies between exercising dominion over the Middle East and securing co-operation there. There is no doubt that the most comfortable way of securing one's interests is to be on the spot and do the job oneself. Unfortunately there may arise circumstances which make this policy either altogether impossible or else so costly in manpower, money, or damage to other interests that it ceases to be expedient. This is what has happened in the Middle East. For a generation after the removal of Turkish rule we (together with the French for a time) were the effective rulers of the Arab world. For the Arabs the pill of alien dominion was sugared by subsidies and other advantages and the rule itself was not bad rule; but that did not prevent it from becoming unpopular with the growing body of nationalist feeling which regarded foreign dominance in any form as *infra dig*. Historians will doubtless be able to say that after the second world war



the only things in doubt about British dominance in the Middle East were the manner and timing of its end. The wall was simply covered with writing: the decline of British world power, the abandonment of empire in India, the request to the U.S.A. to take over British responsibilities in Greece and Turkey, the fate of the Portsmouth and Bevin-Sidky agreements, the abandonment of the Palestine Mandate, the nationalization of Persian oil, the end of the condominium in the Sudan, the retreat from Suez to Cyprus. But facts are one thing, admitting them is another. British actions took account of the facts, but psychologically many people in Britain, including some in high places, had not adjusted themselves to them. Hence Eden's calamitous attempt to fly in the face of the facts and re-assert British political and military power in the autumn of 1956 – to re-occupy Egyptian soil and to decide, as the British had so often decided in the past, who was to be the Egyptian Prime Minister. Hence too the difficulty in working out an alternative to the moribund policy of securing British interests by maintaining client states.

The alternative to staying is going away. In 1947 the British left India lock, stock, and barrel. This very fact made it the more difficult to leave the Middle East too, since no electorate will stand too many doses of retreat and no government would have dared to propose (even had it wished) that the Indian solution should be applied in the Middle East. Yet in the ten years that elapsed after the withdrawal from India, the Middle East showed that there is nothing worse than a half-and-half policy. Withdrawal may be repugnant and is certainly risky, but once the facts dictate it, it needs to be made sharply. Failure to realize this in the Middle East led to actions which blocked the Canal, stopped the flow of oil, facilitated a Russian incursion, shook the Commonwealth, strained our alliances, and evoked worldwide censure – an achievement for which it would be hard to find a parallel in the history of British diplomacy. Local dominance by force and subsidy is no longer possible; the attempt to find a policy short of withdrawal has failed; nothing remains but to draw the inescapable conclusion and to recognize that henceforward we must treat Middle East states as sovereign and independent as we treat most other states. Since we can no longer make them do what we want, we have to persuade them that it will



be a good thing for them if they do; the alternative to coercion is goodwill firmly based on mutual self-interest.

Broadly speaking then, we have to secure our interest in the Middle East by having friends there in place of submissive clients. The next problem is to pick the friends. Should we try to be friends with all the Arabs? Or with Iraq? Or with Egypt? Or with none of the Arabs but with Israel? We have in fact played with all these policies except the last. Unfortunately the first is self-defeating; the second and third are incompatible; and the last offers no hope of securing our two prime interests.

The policy of being friends with all the Arabs at once found expression in the promotion of the Arab League under British aegis towards the end of the second world war. But the Arabs are no more united among themselves than the Europeans or even the Slav or Latin sections of Europe. The only thing that keeps them together is hostility to Israel, but the thought of Israel does not endear us to them since they blame us for the existence of Israel.

Another possibility is to base our position on an alliance with Iraq, a country which is an important oil producer, has a pro-British tradition in its governing class, can be built up as an alternative to Egypt for leadership in the Arab world, and is willing for the time being to participate in an anti-Russian alliance. But there have been danger signals, such as the rejection of the Treaty of Portsmouth by the crowd after it had been approved by the government. Iraq is comparatively well governed by Arab standards and makes reasonably good use of its oil revenues, but there is none the less a revolutionary situation in Iraq, and Britain runs the risk of being identified with a particular social and political caste that may be on the way out. In other words Britain runs the risk of becoming involved willy-nilly in Iraqi politics, and on the losing side. Moreover, the standing of Britain and the pro-British element in Iraq has been seriously impaired by the Anglo-French attack on Egypt. Iraq blames Britain for handling Egypt the wrong way and for occasioning Syria's sabotage of the pipelines through which Iraqi oil has to flow to reach its consumers and earn its royalties. Finally, the Anglo-Iraqi alliance of 1955 serves as a counter neither to Egyptian ambitions nor to Russian threats. When the test came



the Iraqi government, whatever its private feelings, dared not adopt an anti-Egyptian attitude; its Prime Minister might earnestly desire the fall of President Nasser but plainly feared to effect his own if he gave any practical form to his wish. As for the Russian threat, the Baghdad alliance is no deterrent either to Russian attack or to Russian subversion. The United States alone can provide the deterrent to attack, while the antidote to subversion is not to be found in pactomania but in remedies for the Middle East's internal economic and social diseases.

The case for trying to get on with Egypt rests on the argument that Egypt, although not an oil producer, is the most important country in the Arab world. Cairo is a capital city in a sense in which those words cannot be used of neighbouring capitals save out of mere politeness. The rest of the Arab world looks to Cairo and Cairo reaches them by its broadcasts, its films, and its magazines. Since the revolution of 1952 Egypt has seemed the natural ally of the discontented, whether the oppressed poor or the frustrated middle classes. Nasser's Egypt seemed to belong to the future, and Nasser built not unsuccessfully on to this basis the idea that the future belonged to him. After the Anglo-Egyptian agreements on Suez and the Sudan, both Britain and Egypt gave frequent expression to hopes of a new era of mutual friendship, but the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of April 1955 soured the relationship, and since the attack of October 1956 no possibility remains of a policy based on Anglo-Egyptian understanding.

There is no other Arab state of equal consequence with Iraq or Egypt, but there has been an audible if small school of thought which has held that Britain should range itself with Israel. Israel, alone in the Middle East, is a democracy. It is governed by men and women conversant with Western standards and ideas; its leaders behave more like responsible Western parliamentarians than frantic nationalists or predatory oligarchs. But alliance with Israel does not help Britain to get oil or to keep the Russians out of the Middle East. This is not a reason against having an alliance with Israel, but it is a reason against seeking to secure Britain's prime interests by such an alliance.

How then can these interests be secured? We have argued that Britain has no choice but to withdraw from the Middle East as a prerequisite to finding friends there. We see no reliable friends



among the lines we have been exploring. Why is this? The answer is that we shall find no friends unless we not only withdraw militarily but also stop playing politics in the Middle East. We must get out of Middle Eastern politics as well as Middle Eastern bases. We must not only give up arranging who shall be Prime Minister here or Chief of Staff there but we must also give up playing off one country against another. If we do these two things we may regain our influence on a new basis. Our military strength has declined and our political manoeuvres have come undone. There remains economic co-operation.

## 2

*Peace and prosperity*

THERE are few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in making money. The same is true of an area. In South Asia this saying has been put into practice in the Colombo Plan, and the Middle East has in its oil wealth a big advantage over South Asia. Iraq has already shown something of what can be done by the sensible use of oil revenues but there are two big problems which cannot be tackled within the limits of a single country. The first is the marrying of capital with technical skill; the Middle East can produce the capital (if a gallon on the price of oil would produce £50 million a year at present rates of production) and the West can provide the skill. The second problem is how to spread the wealth over the whole area and so produce a development plan for the Middle East and not just a series of development funds for such of the Middle Eastern countries as happen to have oil. Nature has favoured some countries at the expense of others (see Appendix A) but unless man does something to iron out Nature's caprices the danger of upheavals remains, for the have-not countries – Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan – are jealously dissatisfied and will use their position as transit countries to perpetuate dissension.

All who are interested in Middle Eastern oil, whether as producers or consumers or transit countries, have an ultimate common interest. Hitherto this common interest has been over-



laid by politics and obscured by the antagonism between royalty owners trying to get as much as possible out of oil companies and oil companies trying to hold off royalty owners as long as possible. The present pattern is the 50/50 division of profits between local governments and foreign companies. This pattern has spread over the Middle East since its beginnings in Saudi Arabia in 1950, but, as soon as it has become accepted, the companies find themselves waiting for some government to suggest a change, to 60/40. The companies will resist, arouse antagonisms, and lose. And so it goes on, with the oil companies eyeing the rising tide of Arab nationalism in the mood of King Canute's courtiers.

Nobody except small children thinks that Canute's counsellors were very sensible. They were not practical men for they were opposing an unstoppable flood. So are the oil companies as long as they are on the other side of the fence from Arab nationalism – which they cannot help being, however much they may sympathize with some aspects of nationalism. What is needed is an authority to reconcile the interests and override the antagonisms, and since the parties involved include a majority of the countries of the Old World it is clear that an international authority is required. There are prototypes of various kinds – the OEEC, the Colombo Plan, the International Bank – but probably another new variant will have to be evolved to secure outside funds for the Middle East and also to tax the richer Middle East countries for the benefit of the poorer. The problem is not only to get Western moneys for the Middle East but also to persuade Kuwait, for example, to allow part of its oil wealth to be used for the benefit of Syria.

The whole concept of international economic co-operation is still in the experimental stage. It has evolved as an extension to international affairs of the doctrine that the rich should help the poor, but besides this humanitarian ideal there is also the materialistic calculation that it is in the interests of peace-loving powers to eliminate social strains wherever they exist. There is no question of equality, of TV and Cadillacs for all, but only of establishing certain minimum standards below which it is a shame and a danger to allow people to fall. This idea involves the deprivation of the rich for the benefit of the poor. With the world organized as it is at present this means depriving the in-



habitants of the richer states, chiefly the richer inhabitants of the richer states, of a part of their income. There are various ways of doing this but none of them is very satisfactory.

One way is by government grants or loans. Large sums have been expended in this way, particularly by the United States, but unfortunately it stirs up much ill will. It involves parliamentary debates and other public processes in which things are said which are better left unsaid. It also involves yearly debate and so militates against any long term planning by the recipients. It has become proverbial that donors and lenders, however generous, do not make themselves popular. The recipients do not always feel a proper gratitude and the benefactors grow aggrieved and resentful. Moreover, government aid is affected by political considerations. A government – and its parliament and public – will prefer to give aid to a friend. It may also cut off aid, or threaten to do so, if the friendship becomes strained. This is inevitable and natural, but it means that the giving of aid ceases to be governed by purely economic criteria and the donors find themselves caught up in politics.

A second way of giving aid is to do so through the United Nations. But national parliaments are reluctant to vote large sums to be disbursed by an organization whose administrative competence they distrust, and parliaments like to retain, and believe they have a duty to retain, control over expenditure. The professional parsimony of finance ministers is therefore reinforced by arguments of constitutional propriety, and the money stays at home.

There is, thirdly, a special agency of the United Nations, which has been distinctly successful in this field. This is the International Bank. The International Bank is a collective banking venture in which the co-operators have weight and votes in proportion to their commitments. The Bank raises money in the world's principal money markets and lends it for development schemes which are guaranteed by governments and show a businesslike expectation of return. No borrower from the Bank has yet defaulted on its loan – and if it did, it might never be able to borrow again since it would be in default to all the world's principal lenders at once, and could not turn from one to another as was the habit of impecunious countries in days gone by. The



Bank has established a solid reputation based on the skill of its directors but the preservation of this reputation involves limiting its activities in the future as they have been limited in the past. The Bank makes loans and not gifts, and it only makes loans which a business man considers prudent; if it went further it would soon find itself unable to borrow the money it wants to lend.

Finally, there is investment by private companies. Here the limiting factors are the degree of confidence felt by the investor and the degree of tolerance shown by governments for foreign capital – again not primarily economic criteria. The already limited scope for aid of this kind is further limited because only a few types of enterprise fall within it. So far as the Middle East is concerned the oil companies, while not hostile to the creation of a Middle East Development Authority, do not seem anxious to take any initiative. They prefer to regard themselves as commercial concerns conducting commercial operations of purely commercial significance. They are partly right and partly wrong. They are right because oil getting is a commercial operation like the purchase of beef or jute and would be the better for being divorced from politics.<sup>1</sup> But the companies are also taking a risk if they decline to give a lead in developing a foreign economic policy for the Middle East, for their participation is essential to the policy and the policy is essential to their well-being and ours. Yet, as with the Marshall Plan and the Colombo Plan, it will probably be necessary to look for a lead to some prominent political figure.

One of the few things to be said for a crisis is that it induces people to look at plans which in more placid times seem too boldly utopian. A number of plans for the Middle East have recently appeared. The most carefully thought out and most constructive of these (expounded in the *Economist*) provides for the purchase by the U.N. of a strip of Egyptian territory running from Gaza to the Gulf of Aqaba and including the Gaza strip at the one end and the islands guarding the entrance to the gulf at the

1. But getting oil is essentially different from getting, say, beef from Argentina. Oil getting is incomparably more expensive. It is also alien to the ways of the peoples of the Middle East who would not take, or at any rate have not taken, to exploring for, extracting, and refining oil as Argentinians naturally turn to cattle-raising.



other.<sup>1</sup> The internationalization of this zone would serve a variety of purposes. It would keep Egypt and Israel at arm's length, stopping the constant small raids which have led to bigger explosions and postponed the possibility of a settlement. The zone would also reduce the blackmailing opportunities of transit countries like Egypt and Syria, because new pipelines, ultimately even a new canal, would run through it and so could a variety of other land and air communications between west and east. The zone would not be an international armed camp. Although it could accommodate part of the U.N. forces remaining in the Middle East, it would be under civilian control like most other parts of the world; its function would be that of a trip-wire and not a bastion. The U.N. would establish a civilian administration, run by a special agency supported in the last event by U.N. guarantees and by the national forces that back such guarantees, but not subordinate to a military governor. The creation of a buffer zone would enable Egypt and Israel to reduce their military budgets and devote more money to economic and social purposes. New pipelines through the zone would take oil from the producing countries direct to the Mediterranean, where it would resume its way by tanker without needing to pass through any non-producer state. Some producer countries would welcome direct access to a free port in the Mediterranean and the reduction of their dependence on their neighbours. The building of a new canal through terrain so difficult as eastern Sinai seems at present visionary but perhaps not more visionary than the Suez Canal when de Lesseps first began to think about it. Civilian and military aircraft, no less than oil and other goods, require secure passage and services which they would find in the zone but get at present only by the grace of unstable Arab governments. Last but not least the zone would provide work for refugees and other unemployed in building and then maintaining roads and railways, ports and airfields. All this work would require money, but the finance needed would take the form of sound business loans and not of charitable grants, for the zone would quickly become self-supporting if the users were to pay for transit and other facilities at the rates they are paying now for the same services in less favourable conditions.

1. The purchase price should be earmarked by Egypt for the Aswan Dam or some similar scheme.



This is only one scheme. There is no lack of promising schemes, such as irrigation and hydro-electric projects in Israel (see the map on p. 13), which could be supported by the new Middle East Development Authority. Moreover, given an overall plan and an international Authority, the Suez Canal problem falls into its proper place in the general Middle Eastern picture.

## 3

*The Suez Canal*

WHEN Nasser expropriated the Canal Company, the British took the lead in insisting on internationalization. In this they were supported by an overwhelming majority of the canal users including the United States. When, however, the British proposed to achieve this object even by force, they were deserted by all the other users except France. The internationalizers were then divided into an Anglo-French minority who thought no cost too great and a majority who drew the line at force. The opponents of internationalization (chief among them, apart from Egypt itself, were India and the U.S.S.R.) proposed a system of international co-operation with guarantees concerning free passage, fair tolls, and development, but without any of the additional rights which might be regarded as an infringement of Egyptian sovereignty. During October the internationalizers, other than the British and French, became increasingly hopeful of a satisfactory negotiated settlement with Egypt. They had welcomed Hammarskjöld's initiative in arranging private talks between the Egyptian Foreign Minister and the principal users and expected that these exchanges would be continued. But before these hopes could be fulfilled the Israeli anti-Egyptian current had merged with the Suez anti-Egyptian current and the two principal internationalizers joined hands with Israel in making war on Egypt.

The failure of the attack not only put an end to any prospect of establishing international control by force but also weakened the whole party of the internationalizers and boosted the Indo-Egyptian plan. Then, as the British and French withdrew, people began to recollect that Nasser, if a victim of aggression, was hardly



an innocent victim. If it was impossible to go back to the *status quo ante* 26 July, that was no reason for going back to the *status quo ante* 30 October. The right point to go back to is 13 October.

At the meeting of the Security Council which ended on that day all parties had at least agreed on something. After the meeting Fawzi, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, remained in New York for a week and had further discussions with Hammarskjöld, who then summarized the position in a personal letter to Fawzi, developing that part of the Security Council's resolution which had been unanimously approved. Agreement went quite far. Egypt was willing to accept collaboration between an international users' association and the Egyptian operating company, and also to accept international regulation of such things as tolls and the proportion to be set aside for canal development (see Appendixes E and F).

On 2 November the Egyptian Permanent Representative at the U.N. conveyed to Hammarskjöld a written reply from Fawzi, who accepted (subject to one slight reservation) the framework outlined by Hammarskjöld as a possible basis for negotiation. Fawzi wrote that it was worth trying. It still is. If we may risk a prophecy it is that the final settlement will be along the lines worked out in October between Fawzi and the principal users under the aegis of Hammarskjöld. But whatever transpires it is important to remember that the strength of Nasser's position is the unalterable fact that the canal runs through Egypt. In fact Nasser showed no sign of closing the canal until the attack upon him made it militarily expedient to do so; by closing it he loses revenue and diplomatic cards. But in the absence of an army of occupation the ruler of Egypt can always close the canal whether it is internationalized or not. Once foreign troops have gone, free passage depends on Egyptian goodwill. International action can re-open the canal if it is closed but cannot prevent it from being closed.



## 4

*Arabs and Israel*

PACIFICATION, conciliation, settlement, the promotion of wealth and of international justice – all these may be possible on the lines described above; but still there will remain the dispute between the Arabs and Israel. This, intruding into every department of life in the Middle East, may disrupt every promising and beneficial initiative which may be taken to end the quarrel between Arab nationalism and the West. It can poison every well-intended proposal by the West. It precipitated the fighting in November, and it may do so again unless means are found to pad the quarrel.

This must probably be the limit of present ambition. Full pacification is hardly possible; reconciliation cannot happen in this generation, though the West must try constantly to promote it and some of the first steps may be taken even now towards accommodation in the future. For more than this, passions and suspicions are too strong. The bitterness of the two sides must be taken as permanent during the coming period, deplorable though this may be. The issue touches the very continuance of Israel. The Arabs refuse to recognize its right to exist. Seen from outside, the question is whether Israel will in time be extinguished, like the Crusader states which conquered, struggled, and failed in these same parts eight centuries ago.

Israel, by the success of its army in the November fighting, has renewed Arab fears that it may enormously enlarge its borders, and has confirmed the Arabs in their intention to make the extermination of Israel the first claim upon national policy. The Israelis have beaten all the Arabs once and the Egyptians twice. Perhaps they could do so again, but no state can survive if it has to fight against superior numbers every five or six years. In the end the 40 million Arabs must prevail over the 1½ million Israelis if the Arabs are determined and united and become just a little less inefficient. And in the interval, as long as the Arabs can hope for a war of extermination, they will constantly be inclined to turn towards whichever great power promises them arms and military and diplomatic backing in their feud.



In the first years after the first war between the Arabs and Israel, the peace seemed to be preserved by the agreement among the Western powers to starve both sides of arms and, in doling out small quantities, to keep the balance even. That was the policy summed up in the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 (see Appendix D). But this policy was adequate only because the signatories of the Declaration were the only suppliers of arms in the region and could regulate the supply in the manner of a cartel. This state of affairs ceased as soon as the Russians began to supply arms too. After that a balance could be kept only in one of two ways: either the West must risk an arms race whenever the Russians upset the balance, or the cartel must be enlarged by bringing the Russians into it.

In future the region will be fully armed and unstable. To the Arab-Israel element of instability are added other elements within the Arab world itself. There are centripetal and centrifugal forces, forces making for unity and forces making for fragmentation. Egypt, Syria, and Jordan have seemed to be drawing towards confederation with or without Saudi Arabia. At other times the Hashimite kings of Iraq and Jordan have been suspected of designs to federate and swallow Syria. Nor is the danger from Israel to be overlooked. Continued pressure on Israel, combined with the brilliant successes of Israeli arms, could turn Israel into a military state and make it the Sparta of the Middle East, repeating the exploits of the Maccabees and of the Jewish battalions in the Roman armies.

Peace depends on the Americans and the Russians. Together they can enforce peace, preferably acting through the United Nations. The Russians are alarmed by American military establishments in the Middle East. The Americans are alarmed by the increased Russian influence and increased instability since the Suez venture. There are therefore the makings of a deal. The Americans could undertake not to join the Baghdad Pact in its present predominantly military form provided the Russians joined with the West in guaranteeing Arab-Israel frontiers. This guarantee is essential, because without it the Arabs will never give up thinking that some day they can drive the Israelis into the sea. Yet, in surrendering this ambition, the Arabs gain protection against the threat of Israeli expansion.



Is there too much risk in abandoning Middle East bases? We think not. Keeping the Russians out is achieved by an American threat, but the threat need not come from the Middle East itself. So long as there is an American threat, it does not matter whether American forces prepared to implement it can attack Russia from one side or another. The Middle East bases (which do us more harm than good when it comes to competing for local goodwill) are therefore negotiable.

Keeping the peace between the Great Powers is one thing. Keeping local peace by the Great Powers is another. Here the first necessity is to be resolute and convincing. The Great Powers must be resolved to keep the peace and must make clear how they propose to act if frontiers are violated. They must determine a course of action in advance and make it known. The present emergency force of the United Nations in the Middle East is not equipped for such forceful action as would be necessary, even if it turns out to be a more permanent body than Nasser intends that it should be. The best means of deterring Israel and the Arabs from conflict is a threat from the air, since no ground force could be large enough to ring the whole of the uneasy borders. The sanction of peace might thus take the form of United Nations air squadrons – either detachments from national air forces or squadrons recruited directly by the Secretary-General – stationed permanently at some appropriate centre such as Cyprus, under a resident commanding officer appointed by the Assembly and armed with a directive to threaten force, or in the last resort to use force, against any aggressor who crosses a frontier and shows, by refusing to retreat within a brief period, that his operation is not a raid but an invasion.

Action by the United Nations force, which in those circumstances would most suitably be the bombardment of the airfields of the offending side, would be a very grave matter, and preferably it should be taken only after reference to an emergency meeting of the Assembly. But if the guarantee is to be an effective deterrent, the commander of the force must be empowered to act at his discretion in an emergency, reporting to the Assembly immediately afterwards. Very grave responsibility would rest on his shoulders, and he would need to be a man of eminence, in whom governments would repose confidence. In general he



would act under the instructions of the Assembly, not of the Security Council, for if the Security Council controlled the force the veto of one of the Great Powers could keep it permanently out of action.

For what length of time should the force be constituted? Nobody can say. The Assembly should review the position annually, or at shorter intervals, and the retention of the force would depend upon the renewal from time to time of the resolution which set it up, as the existence of the British Army depends on the periodical renewal of the Army Act.

This scheme may not be acceptable to Russia. Despite the advantages to Russia of a deal which would minimize the American threat, Moscow will not lightly abandon one of its principal means of causing trouble and keeping the Middle East in uncertainty. In that event the plan would have to be maintained by the majority of the Assembly in the teeth of the opposition of Russia and its allies, who would constantly seek to end it. But any effective plan to maintain peace must encounter this opposition; to give way before it is to ensure that, sooner or later, peace will once again break down. Nato too is maintained in defiance of Russia; and a Middle East force would, unlike Nato, have the support of a majority of the members of the United Nations.

If the frontiers of Israel are guaranteed, that is no reason why they should not also be rectified. There is a case for concessions by Israel in the south; there is a case for the surrender by Jordan of the Jordan salient. To prevent change by violence is not to prevent change by other means. As for Jerusalem, the late King Abdullah of Jordan and the Israelis were ready to agree on a partition but were prevented by the other Arab states. Time has now brought about partition, and the best thing to do is to sanctify by treaty what time has written on the ground.

It is true that the Tripartite Declaration against the violation of frontiers did not avail to stop Israel's aggression in November 1956, and was not implemented when the aggression happened. Will not either side, if it feels adventurous, take the chance that its friends may deter the United Nations commander from acting? Perhaps this is so. But there are significant differences between the plan suggested and the Tripartite Declaration. The Tripartite



Declaration was not really a guarantee. It was not a promise to help Israel if its frontiers were breached, but only a Declaration by the Western powers among themselves about their own interests and intentions. It gave Israel no right to call a power to its aid. Consequently it gave the Arabs no reason to abandon their hope of eventually extinguishing Israel. In any case it soon came to be generally believed that the three powers did not mean even the little they had said in their Declaration.

It is melancholy that Arabs and Jews cannot be kept from springing at one another unless their lands are overshadowed by a bombing fleet. But they have sprung twice within eight years. It is better to act sombrely and keep the peace than optimistically and forfeit it. At the first sign of cooler tempers on either side, the opportunity may be grasped of devising less crude ways of deterring aggression. If Israel and the Arabs can be associated economically in development projects, such as the Jordan waters scheme, and if the Arab refugees can be compensated and resettled – perhaps at the expense of United Nations agencies – some of the asperities may be reduced. If the Arabs can be induced to accept some of the offers made from time to time by Israel and always hitherto rejected – for a corridor between Egypt and Jordan, for the use of Haifa, for the return of selected refugees – tempers may slowly cool. Until they do so, the United Nations must provide the will, and the major powers the force, to blanket violence, or there will again be violence in that most violent corner of the world.

## 5

*Summary*

To summarize: there is a Russian threat in the Middle East and this can be countered only by the United States. The counter involves a clear understanding that the United States will not allow the Middle East to become a part of the Russian sphere of influence. In terms of great power rivalry the Middle East must remain an open area and not become one power's backyard. The sanction is military force, but it is not necessary that Amer-



ican forces should be stationed in the Middle East itself. It is enough that they should be able to threaten the U.S.S.R. from any quarter.

If the Middle East is to be an open area in great power politics, the West must compete for the favours of the inhabitants and their rulers. The West cannot compete successfully if it tries to dominate the area by force.

Britain must abandon all idea of dominating the Middle East or having clients or subordinates there. British forces in the Middle East do us more harm than good and should be progressively withdrawn (unless they are part of an international force).

To keep the peace between Middle Eastern states the major powers must guarantee Arab-Israeli frontiers and support an international air force to be stationed in Cyprus. If the Russians refuse to join in the guarantee or oppose the force, the Americans and other powers must give the guarantee without the Russians, and the U.N. must persist with the force in the face of Russian opposition.

An international zone should be established between Egypt and Israel under civil administration. This zone will contain new pipelines carrying oil from producer countries directly to the Mediterranean. It will also contain a principal staging point for international airlines. A new canal might be dug one day.

The existing canal should be operated by an Egyptian authority in association with a canal users' authority on the lines worked out during the session of the Security Council in October 1956.

Western countries should join in promoting and paying for a development scheme for the Middle East as a whole, to be administered by an international authority which would draw revenues from oil. Consumers would contribute by a levy of something like a  $\frac{1}{4}$ d per gallon on the price of oil. Royalty owners would make a similar contribution. Development funds would be spread over the whole area, with the result that oil-producing countries would be allotting a part of their royalties to the development of have-not countries.



## *Tailpiece*

AFTER the second world war British power and resources were no longer what they had been. The government began to cut the British coat to fit its cloth but the operation was a painful one. Many people are unable to see in a policy of retrenchment a mere adjustment to circumstances; they also feel it as a slur on the national character. When they describe a retreat from empire as a painful necessity they are more aware of the pain than the necessity. This is especially true of people for whom empire is a romantic and sentimental concept. If imperialists were the hard-bitten characters that they are sometimes made out to be, there would be some chance of appealing to their sense of calculation, but for the most part they thrive on emotions rather than calculations; and emotions are more difficult to change than calculations. Such people can bring disaster. Half a century ago the Austrian empire was shrinking under the pressure of a mixture of circumstances which included the rise of anti-Austrian nationalisms in various subordinate provinces. In 1914 Austria, under the guidance of men of narrow vision and stubborn temper, lashed out at Serbia, started a world war and broke up the empire for ever. These men felt the loss of power to be ignoble. So they lost their heads. People have sometimes regretted the disappearance of the Austrian empire but they have never known how to put it together again.



## APPENDIXES <sup>1</sup>

### A. *Some oil facts and figures*

WE often hear it said that we live in the atomic age. This may be true if we are thinking in terms of war, but it is not true of peacetime. In peace we run on oil and we will continue to run chiefly on oil for a long time to come.

The principal sources of power for industry and transport, for making and moving the things we live by, are coal, hydro-electric power, and oil, to which atomic energy is being added in our lifetime. In 1955 we consumed the coal equivalent of 25 million tons of oil. The government has said that our standard of living is to be doubled in 25 years and has estimated that by 1985 this 25 million tons will need to be increased to 91 million tons, even allowing for increased use of coal and hydro-electric power and a substantial contribution from atomic energy. The rest of Western Europe faces a similar prospect. Where is all this oil to come from?

The answer is: the Middle East or nowhere as far as can be seen. There are three outstanding oil-producing areas – the United States, the Middle East, and Venezuela. The United States is far the most productive; it produces nearly half the world's oil. But it is now on balance an importer and has little to spare for anybody else. Venezuela's oil is mostly consumed in the western hemisphere and it is now a much lower producer than the Middle East. Canada and Indonesia have large, possibly immense, resources, but these have not yet been properly tapped. New sources are continually being sought and the oil companies spend huge sums on exploration and prospecting – for example in Libya, the Sahara, East Africa – but the Middle East remains essential. At present Britain gets two-thirds of its oil from the Middle East. We might be able, for a time and at a cost, to replace about one-tenth of this from elsewhere, but even this would leave us dependent on the Middle East for well over half our imports.

1. A fuller selection of relevant documents will be found in *Documents on the Suez crisis, 26 July to 6 November 1956, selected and introduced by D. C. Watt*. (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957.)



*World output 1955 in million tons – total 786*

U.S.A.	357	Canada	17
Middle East	163	Indonesia	11
Venezuela	111	Western Europe	10
U.S.S.R.	70	Eastern Europe	10
Latin America	30	Far East	7
(except Venezuela)		(except Indonesia)	

The relative importance of the Middle East in the world oil picture is new. Before the war Caribbean production was greater than Middle Eastern, but during the war great efforts were made to increase Persian production and after the war Saudi Arabia and Kuwait gushed onto the scene. The result has been to lift the Middle East as a whole up the scale and radically to alter the pattern within the Middle East, where the newer fields have rapidly overtaken the older ones in Persia and Iraq. The spectacular increase in oil wealth also sharpened the jealousy of those Middle Eastern states which had no oil at all – Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt.

*Middle East output 1955 in million tons and percentage of proved world reserves*

Kuwait	55	20·8
Saudi Arabia	48	18·7
Iraq	34	10·2
Persia	16	13·8
Other	10	1·1
	<hr/> 163	<hr/> 64·6

These oil-less countries have nevertheless some share in the oil wealth of the area because two-thirds of it flows through their territory either through pipelines or carried in tankers through the Suez Canal, which is for this purpose a sort of open pipe (carrying other goods besides oil). The matters to be considered in connexion with the transport of oil are the adequacy of the facilities to the flow, their vulnerability to political pressures, and their relative cost. Our most pressing problems arise because the existing facilities – tankers plus pipes plus canal – are only just adequate now and will be inadequate in a few years to meet our ever increasing needs. There is therefore a transport bottleneck.



Producers and consumers have an equal interest in removing the bottleneck, while the transit countries also stand to gain provided that the cure means more oil passing through their territories and not the re-routing of oil round the Cape in super-tankers.

Existing pipelines run westward to the Mediterranean from the Iraqi and Saudi oilfields. The oldest pipes, opened in 1934, are the two which run from Kirkuk in northern Iraq through Syria and the Lebanon to Tripoli (with a branch through Jordan and Israel to Haifa, closed since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli war). In 1950 a new and larger pipe was opened from Kirkuk through Syria only to Banias. These pipes carry 25 million tons a year. The pipeline from Saudi Arabia, called TAP-line, carries 16 million tons a year through Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon to Sidon. The total of piped oil, excluding the Haifa branch, is therefore 41 million tons a year. The canal has been carrying oil from south to north at the rate of 77 million tons a year<sup>1</sup> and so the total passing through the transit countries has reached 118 million tons. A little more than one-tenth of this total goes to the United States, the rest to Europe. The blocking of the Iraqi pipelines and the canal as a result of the Anglo-French attack on Egypt reduced the rate of flow to the Mediterranean from 118 to 16 million tons a year.

The pipes and canal, being in foreign territory, are as much a hostage to fortune as was the Abadan refinery. Transport facilities are not only inadequate but also vulnerable. Various proposals have been made for easing the situation. They include the construction of a new pipeline from Iraq through Turkey by-passing Syria, and the relief of the canal by digging a second parallel channel or by laying a pipe along one bank. In addition, the principal tanker fleets are being expanded and new super-tankers of 50,000 tons and upwards are being built; the latter will not be able to get through the canal loaded. Tankers have certain advantages over pipes. They take less steel and their

1. The canal carries twice as much oil as dry goods. Its importance for the oil traffic is best shown by comparing the present 77 million tons with the pre-war figure of 5.25 million. Britain is much the largest user of the canal (28 per cent of total tonnage). British tonnage, wet and dry, has doubled since before the war and Britain takes one-third of all the oil passing through the canal.



mobility removes them from the dangers of sabotage. On the other hand, available building capacity is heavily booked and there are few places in the world where super-tankers can be built, berthed, or dry-docked. Ultimately there may be a choice to be made between one method of transport and another, but in the immediate future we need more pipes, a wider canal, and more and bigger tankers. The capital needed to ensure the supplies we need during the next generation is very big but not beyond the capacities of the oil companies, with the possible exception of super-tankers for which government subsidies may be needed.<sup>1</sup>

The extraction of oil in the Middle East has been regulated by agreements made between local governments and concessionaires who were at first individuals but are now large corporations. The concessionaires have always been foreigners – British, French, and Dutch, with the Americans coming later – for the simple reason that only foreigners had the skill and financial resources to do the job. The concession agreements delimited an area and a period and left it to the concessionaire to get what he could within these limits, paying to the conceding government royalties commensurate with his success. The basis for the calculation of the royalties and their extent has frequently been in dispute, the governments trying to get more whenever they could and the companies resisting as long as they could. The essence of the financial relations between governments and companies was therefore hostility, to which the rise of nationalism added a political ingredient. The present pattern is the 50 : 50 agreement made in 1950 between the King of Saudi Arabia and the Arab-American Oil Company (Aramco). In Persia, where a radically different pattern has been adopted, the oil has been nationalized and the pattern is different, but the 50 : 50 result is reached in a different way.

1. Perhaps governments should put into tankers the money they used to put into battleships.



B. *Letter from Lord Palmerston to  
Lord Clarendon, 1857<sup>1</sup>*

As to the Emperor's (Napoleon III) schemes about Africa, the sooner Cowley (British Ambassador in Paris) sends in his grounds of objection the better. It is very possible that many parts of the world would be better governed by France, England, and Sardinia than they are now, and we need not go beyond Italy, Sicily, and Spain for examples. But the alliance of England and France has derived its strength not merely from the military and naval power of the two States, but from the force of the moral principle upon which that union had been founded. Our union has for its foundation resistance to unjust aggression, the defence of the weak against the strong, and the maintenance of the existing balance of power. How, then, could we combine to become unprovoked aggressors, to imitate, in Africa, the partition of Poland by the conquest of Morocco for France, of Tunis and some other State for Sardinia, and of Egypt for England? And, more especially, how could England and France, who have guaranteed the integrity of the Turkish Empire, turn round and wrest Egypt from the Sultan? A coalition for such a purpose would revolt the moral feelings of mankind, and would certainly be fatal to any English Government that was a party to it. Then, as to the balance of power to be maintained by giving us Egypt. In the first place, we don't want to have Egypt. What we wish about Egypt is that it should continue attached to the Turkish Empire, which is a security against its belonging to any European Power. We want to trade with Egypt, and to travel through Egypt, but we do not want the burden of governing Egypt, and its possession would not, as a political, military, and naval question, be considered in this country as a set-off against the possession of Morocco by France.

Let us try to improve all these countries by the general influence of our commerce, but let us all abstain from a crusade of conquest which would call down upon us the condemnation of all the other civilized nations.

1. Reproduced from *Studies in Diplomatic History*, by Sir James Headlam-Morley (Methuen, 1930), p. 55.



C. *Text of Convention between Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia, and Turkey, respecting the Free Navigation of the Suez Maritime Canal. Signed at Constantinople, 29 October 1888*

1. The Suez Maritime Canal shall always be free and open, in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag.

Consequently, the High Contracting Parties agree not in any way to interfere with the free use of the Canal, in time of war as in time of peace.

The Canal shall never be subjected to the exercise of the right of blockade.

2. The High Contracting Parties, recognizing that the Fresh Water Canal is indispensable to the Maritime Canal, take note of the engagements of His Highness the Khedive towards the Universal Suez Canal Company as regards the Fresh Water Canal; which engagements are stipulated in a Convention bearing the date of 18 March 1863, containing an *exposé* and four Articles.

They undertake not to interfere in any way with the security of that Canal and its branches, the working of which shall not be exposed to any attempt at obstruction.

3. The High Contracting Parties likewise undertake to respect the plant, establishments, buildings, and works of the Maritime Canal and of the Fresh Water Canal.

4. The Maritime Canal remaining open in time of war as a free passage, even to ships of war of belligerents, according to the terms of Article 1 of the present Treaty, the High Contracting Parties agree that no right of war, no act of hostility, nor any act having for its object to obstruct the free navigation of the Canal, shall be committed in the Canal and its ports of access, as well as within a radius of three marine miles from those ports, even though the Ottoman Empire should be one of the belligerent Powers.

Vessels of war of belligerents shall not revictual or take in stores in the Canal and its ports of access, except in so far as may be strictly necessary. The transit of the aforesaid vessels through



the Canal shall be effected with the least possible delay, in accordance with the Regulations in force, and without any other intermission than that resulting from the necessities of the service.

Their stay at Port Said and in the roadstead of Suez shall not exceed twenty-four hours, except in case of distress. In such case they shall be bound to leave as soon as possible. An interval of twenty-four hours shall always elapse between the sailing of a belligerent ship from one of the ports of access and the departure of a ship belonging to the hostile Power.

5. In time of war belligerent Powers shall not disembark nor embark within the Canal and its ports of access either troops, munitions, or materials of war. But in case of an accidental hindrance in the Canal, men may be embarked or disembarked at the ports of access by detachments not exceeding 1,000 men, with a corresponding amount of war material.

6. Prizes shall be subjected, in all respects, to the same rules as the vessels of war of belligerents.

7. The Powers shall not keep any vessel of war in the waters of the Canal (including Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes).

Nevertheless, they may station vessels of war in the ports of access of Port Said and Suez, the number of which shall not exceed two for each power.

This right shall not be exercised by belligerents.

8. The Agents in Egypt of the Signatory Powers of the present Treaty shall be charged to watch over its execution. In case of any event threatening the security or the free passage of the Canal, they shall meet on the summons of three of their number under the presidency of their Doyen, in order to proceed to the necessary verifications. They shall inform the Khedival Government of the danger which they may have perceived, in order that the government may take proper steps to insure the protection and the free use of the Canal. Under any circumstances, they shall meet once a year to take note of the due execution of the Treaty.

The last-mentioned meetings shall take place under the presidency of a Special Commissioner nominated for that purpose by the Imperial Ottoman Government. A Commissioner of the Khedive may also take part in the meeting, and may preside over it in case of the absence of the Ottoman Commissioner.

They shall especially demand the suppression of any work or



the dispersion of any assemblage on either bank of the Canal, the object or effect of which might be to interfere with the liberty and the entire security of the navigation.

9. The Egyptian Government shall, within the limits of its powers resulting from the Firmans, and under the conditions provided for in the present Treaty, take the necessary measures for insuring the execution of the said Treaty.

In case the Egyptian Government shall not have sufficient means at its disposal, it shall call upon the Imperial Ottoman Government, which shall take the necessary measures to respond to such appeal; shall give notice thereof to the Signatory Powers of the Declaration of London of the 17 March 1885; and shall, if necessary, concert with them on the subject.

The provisions of Articles 4, 5, 7, and 8 shall not interfere with the measures which shall be taken in virtue of the present Article.

10. Similarly, the provisions of Articles 4, 5, 7, and 8 shall not interfere with the measures which His Majesty the Sultan and His Highness the Khedive, in the name of His Imperial Majesty, and within the limits of the Firmans granted, might find it necessary to take for securing by their own forces the defence of Egypt and the maintenance of public order.

In case His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, or His Highness the Khedive, should find it necessary to avail themselves of the exceptions for which this Article provides, the Signatory Powers of the Declaration of London shall be notified thereof by the Imperial Ottoman Government.

It is likewise understood that the provisions of the four Articles aforesaid shall in no case occasion any obstacle to the measures which the Imperial Ottoman Government may think it necessary to take in order to insure by its own forces the defence of its other possessions situated on the eastern coast of the Red Sea.

11. The measures which shall be taken in the cases provided for by Articles 9 and 10 of the present Treaty shall not interfere with the free use of the Canal. In the same cases, the erection of permanent fortifications contrary to the provisions of Article 8 is prohibited.

12. The High Contracting Parties, by application of the principle of equality as regards the free use of the Canal, a principle which forms one of the bases of the present Treaty, agree that



none of them shall endeavour to obtain with respect to the Canal territorial or commercial advantages or privileges in any international arrangements which may be concluded. Moreover, the rights of Turkey as the territorial Power are reserved.

13. With the exception of the obligations expressly provided by the clauses of the present Treaty, the sovereign rights of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan and the rights and immunities of his Highness the Khedive, resulting from the Firmans, are in no way affected.

14. The High Contracting Parties agree that the engagements resulting from the present Treaty shall not be limited by the duration of the Acts of Concession of the Universal Suez Canal Company.

15. The stipulations of the present Treaty shall not interfere with the sanitary measures in force in Egypt.

16. The High Contracting Parties undertake to bring the present Treaty to the knowledge of the States which have not signed it, inviting them to accede to it.

17. The present Treaty shall be ratified, and the ratifications shall be exchanged at Constantinople, within the space of one month, or sooner, if possible.

#### *D. The Tripartite Declaration*

ISSUED 25 May 1950 by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

1. The three Governments recognize that the Arab States and Israel all need to maintain a certain level of armed forces for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defence and to permit them to play their part in the defence of the area as a whole. All applications for arms or war material for these countries will be considered in the light of these principles. In this connection the three Governments wish to recall and reaffirm the terms of the statements made by their representatives on the Security Council on 4 August 1949, in which they declared their opposition to the development of an arms race between the Arab States and Israel.



2. The three Governments declare that assurances have been received from all the States in question to which they permit arms to be supplied from their countries that the purchasing State does not intend to undertake any act of aggression against any other State. Similar assurances will be requested from any other States in the area to which they permit arms to be supplied in the future.

3. The three Governments take this opportunity of declaring their deep interest in and their desire to promote the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the area, and their unalterable opposition to the use of force or threat of force between any of the States in that area. The three Governments, should they find that any of these States was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently with their obligations as members of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation.

*E. Resolution adopted unanimously by the Security Council, 13 October 1956*

*The Security Council,*

*Noting* the declarations made before it and the accounts of the development of the exploratory conversations on the Suez question given by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, France, and the United Kingdom;

*Agrees* that any settlement of the Suez question should meet the following requirements:

1. there should be free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination, overt or covert – this covers both political and technical aspects;
2. the sovereignty of Egypt should be respected;
3. the operation of the Canal should be insulated from the politics of any country;
4. the manner of fixing tolls and charges should be decided by agreement between Egypt and the users;



5. a fair proportion of the dues should be allotted to development;
6. in case of disputes, unresolved affairs between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government should be settled by arbitration with suitable terms of reference and suitable provisions for the payment of sums found to be due.

*F. Letter from Hammarskjöld to Fawzi,  
24 October 1956*

PERSONAL AND STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Dr Fawzi,

You will remember that at the end of the private talks on Suez, trying to sum up what I understood as being the sense of the discussion, I covered not only the 'requirements', later approved by the Security Council, but also in a summary form arrangements that had been discussed as possible means of meeting those requirements. However, time then proved insufficient for a satisfactory exploration of those arrangements.

Before you left New York I raised with you the question of time and place for a resumption of the exploratory talks, in case the three Governments directly concerned would find that such further talks should be tried. As a follow up to these observations to which, so far, I have had no reactions either from you or from Mr Selwyn Lloyd or M. Pineau, I would, for my own sake, wish to put on paper how I envisage the situation that would have to be studied at resumed exploratory talks, if they were to come about.

Again, what I do is not to put out any proposals on my own, nor try to formulate proposals made by you or any of the others. Just as I did at the end of the private talks in New York, I just wish, in my own words, to try and spell out what are my conclusions from the – entirely noncommittal – observations made in the course of the private talks, interpolating on some points in the light of my interpretation of the sense of the talks where they did not fully cover the ground. Whether you approve of my



phrasing or not, I feel that it would be valuable to know if, in your view, I have correctly interpreted the conclusions from the tentative thinking which would provide the background for further explorations.

1. From the discussions I understood that the legal reaffirmation of all the obligations under the Constantinople Convention should not present any difficulty; this is a question of form, not of substance. I further understood that it would not present any difficulties to widen the obligations under the Convention to cover the questions of maximum of tolls (as at present); maintenance and development; reporting to the United Nations.

2. Nor should, if I understood the sense of the discussions correctly, the questions of the Canal Code and the regulations present any difficulties of substance, as I understood the situation to be that no revision of the Code or the regulations was envisaged which would lead to rules less adequate than the present Rules. I further understood that revisions would be subject to consultation.

3. Nor, in my understanding, should the question of tolls and charges present any difficulties, as, according to what emerged in the discussions, the manner of fixing tolls and charges would be subject to agreement, and as also the reservation of a certain part of the dues for development purposes would be subject to agreement.

4. Nor, in my understanding, should the principle of organized co-operation between an Egyptian Authority and the users give rise to any differences of views, while, on the other hand, it obviously represents a field where the arrangements to be made call for careful exploration in order to make sure that they would meet the three first requirements approved by the Security Council. The following points in the summing up of my understanding of the sense of the discussions refer to this question of implementation of an organized co-operation:

A. The co-operation requires obviously an organ on the Egyptian side (the authority in charge of the operation of the Canal), and a representation of the users, recognized by the Canal Authority (and the Egyptian Government) and entitled to speak for the Users.

B. Provisions should be made for joint meetings between the



Authority and the representation to all the extent necessary to effect the agreed co-operation.

c. Within the framework of the co-operation, the representation should be entitled to raise all matters affecting the Users' rights or interests, for discussion and consultation or by way of complaint. The representation should, on the other hand, of course not, in exercising its functions, do this in such a way as to interfere with the administrative functions of the operating organ.

d. The co-operation which would develop on the basis of points A-C, would not give satisfaction to the three first requirements approved by the Security Council unless completed with arrangements for fact-finding, reconciliation, recourse to appropriate juridical settlement of possible disputes, and guarantees for execution of the results of reconciliation or juridical settlements of disputes.

E. (a) Fact-finding can be provided for by direct access for the Party concerned to a checking of relevant facts, or by a Standing (Joint) Organ, with appropriate representation for both Parties:

(b) A Standing (Joint) Organ might also be considered for reconciliation;

(c) In case of unresolved differences, as to facts or other relevant questions, not resolved by the arrangements so far mentioned, recourse should be possible – as the case may be – to a Standing Local Organ for arbitration, set up in accordance with common practices, or to whatever other arbitration organ found necessary in the light of a further study of the character of the conflicts that may arise, or to the International Court of Justice (whose jurisdiction in this case of course should be mandatory), or to the Security Council (or whatever other Organ of the United Nations that may be established under the rules of the Charter);

(d) Concerning the implementation of findings by a United Nations Organ, normal rules should apply. In respect of the implementation of awards made by a Standing Organ for Arbitration, or by whatever other organ may be established for similar purposes, the parties should undertake to recognize the awards as binding, when rendered, and undertake to carry them out in good faith. In case of a complaint because of alleged non-compliance with an award, the same arbitration organ which



gave the award, should register the fact of non-compliance. Such a 'constatation' would give the complaining party access to all normal forms of redress, but also the right to certain steps in self-protection, the possible scope of which should be subject to an agreement in principle; both sides, thus, in a case of a 'constatation', should be entitled to certain limited 'police action', even without recourse to further juridical procedures.

5. It was, finally, my understanding that the question covered by the requirement in Point 6 of the Security Council Resolution, would not give rise to special difficulties, as the subject seems fairly well covered by the formulation of the principles itself.

Whether or not a set of arrangements will meet the first three requirements approved by the Security Council, will, according to my understanding of the situation, depend on the reply to the questions under Point 4 above. That is true not only with an arrangement starting from the assumption of operation of the Canal by an Egyptian Authority, but also on the assumption that the operation of the Canal (in the narrow sense of the word) is organized in another way. If I have rightly interpreted the sense of the discussions as concerns specifically the questions of verification, recourse, and enforcement (Point 4, (B) ), and if, thus, no objection in principle is made *a priori* against arrangements as set down above, I would, from a legal and technical point of view – without raising here the political considerations which come into play – consider the framework sufficiently wide to make a further exploration of a possible basis for negotiations along the lines indicated worth trying.

I am sure you appreciate that whatever clarification you may give of your reaction to this interpretation of mine of the possibilities, would be helpful for me in contacts with other parties – of the reactions of which I likewise need a more complete picture – and might smooth the way to progress beyond the point reached in the private talks.

Yours sincerely,

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD.



## SPOTLIGHT ON ASIA

GUY WINT

S 164

### *The clash of rival traditions and philosophies in Asia*

Mr Nehru often urges people in the West to recognize how fast Asia is changing. But the change has not begun only in our day. It started with the British occupation of India which transformed the sub-continent. India became the home of a liberal civilization, and in course of time its political institutions have become those of parliamentary democracy. Besides India, the other great originating centre of civilization in Asia is China. In China also there has been radical change, but the result has been to create a civilization derived partly from the example of Communist Russia and partly from the traditions of Asia's despotic past. Voluntarily or involuntarily, India and China are now in competition to see which is to become the pattern for the rest of Asia, and the issue is complicated by the world struggle of the great powers.

This book records these vicissitudes of the Asian continent, and describes a competition on whose result much of future world history will depend. For, as Lenin said, 'In the last analysis, the issue will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, and China represent a crushing majority of the population of the globe.'



## PETER CALVOCORESSI

Peter Calvocoressi was born in 1912. He was a Scholar of Eton and a Commoner of Balliol College, Oxford, where he obtained a first class degree in History in 1934. He was called to the bar in 1935. During the war he worked in Air Intelligence and Secret Intelligence, attaining the rank of Wing Commander. He attended the Nuremberg trial and wrote a book about it. He was on the staff of Chatham House for five years and wrote five volumes of the annual *Survey of International Affairs*. He is now a publisher and a member of the Council for the Royal Institute of International Affairs and does some lecturing, writing, and broadcasting. He is married and has two sons, and lives in Bedfordshire.

## GUY WINT

Guy Wint has been a leader writer on the *Manchester Guardian* for the past ten years. Before he became a journalist he was in various forms of government service, chiefly in the East. He has written a number of books on Eastern topics, including *India and Democracy* (jointly with Sir George Schuster), *The British in Asia*, *What Happened in Korea*, and a Penguin Special which appeared in 1955, *Spotlight on Asia*. Since the clouds darkened in the Middle East, he has concentrated chiefly on the relations of Israel and the Arab states, and on the Middle East policies of the great powers.